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The BOUND

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THE BOUNDER

A VULGAR Tale

BY ARTHUR HODGES

Author of

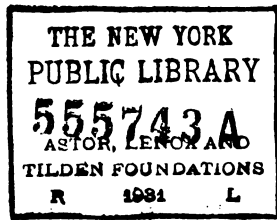
THE ESSENTIAL THING and PINCUS HOOD



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THE BOUNDER



THE BOUNDER

CHAPTER I

By a strange coincidence, on the very night this story begins, something was happening in Miss St. David's flat in the Kilkenny Apartment House. It is true that it would have been hard to find a night when something *was n't* happening there, but this was a very special something, being nothing less than a farewell party to that great, husky, good-looking young brute Fred Filbert. Everybody in the Kilkenny had been invited except Miss McGuirk the dressmaker, first flight left back, who said she would n't have gone, anyway, Miss St. David being, as she told the colored janitor Sid Smallshaw, that smiling repository of the opinions of all the tenants of the Kilkenny of all the others, "no better than she ought to be."

This was n't exactly fair of Miss McGuirk because she had no real reason for saying so. Miss McGuirk did n't like Miss St. David because Miss St. David owed her a bill which she — Miss St. David — said she never *would* pay because the things did n't fit — and because Miss McGuirk had to acknowledge that Miss St. David was handsome — Miss McGuirk was n't — and handsome Miss St. David was in a big, sleepy,

damn-your-eyes sort of way that made people turn around in the street and stare at her.

Although the tenants of the Kilkenny were principally an easy-going lot who did n't ask questions, it was sometimes admitted during periods of reflection that it was mighty funny the extravagant way Miss St. David lived and she without any visible means of support — But as to not being a perfect lady! Well! — and then an anecdote of Sid Smallshaw's would be quoted.

The Kilkenny stood in the heart of that quarter of the city given over to the spending of much money for pleasure, to the vending of fashionable commodities, to luxurious clubs and expensive restaurants and hotels. Every building around it spoke the last word of metropolitan prosperity and magnificence in no uncertain voice, but the Kilkenny wedged in among them had remained old-fashioned, inconvenient, and generally out of date for reasons which will be given later.

Miss St. David having been frequently and favorably noticed as she passed one of the aforesaid clubs, a member of it decided to make a conquest and, hurrying out after her one day, raised his hat politely, addressing her with the customary enchanting smile, whereupon Miss St. David, made rebellious because this kind of thing had happened so often, after one sleepy glance, suddenly got busy, fetched him a stinging slap on the side of the head and was immediately frightened at her own violence. Sid Smallshaw, standing on the cellar steps with his head just above the level of the pavement

his customary coign, saw the whole engagement and described it later with a mixture of relish and awe.

Miss St. David occupied the second right front, which just suited her because she could easily watch from her windows what was passing in the street and because she had only to climb one flight of stairs to reach it. Fred Filbert had lived in the second left front, but he had just moved out, so that was vacant. And *en passant* a sensation had just been caused in the Kilkenny by Sid Smallshaw's announcement that Miss St. David had rented it, was going to knock a door through, and occupy it in addition to her own. The two front apartments on the ground floor were supposed to be suitable for doctors, but as no doctors — nor anybody else for that matter — could ever be induced to live in them, owing to their smallness, dampness, and darkness, they were vacant too. An effort had been made to turn one of them into a kind of reception-room where visitors, instead of ringing your bell and walking right upstairs, and perhaps putting a foot in your door as soon as it was opened so that you could n't shut it again, could be made to wait until Sid Smallshaw might ascertain whether they were the kind you wanted to see, or only people with bills to collect. But old Mr. Penfield, the owner, who was notoriously slow of action, had been considering the suggestion for a couple of years, and the tenant who had made it had disappeared long since. One of the ground-floor rear flats was occupied by Sid Smallshaw himself. It was so dark, even in broad daylight,

that you could n't see Sid Smallshaw when he was in it, Sid being very dark too, unless he happened to have his light check suit on. The other he kept filled with treasure trove — miscellaneous articles left behind by departing tenants — which he sold to the junk man, over beyond Seventh Avenue.

In the first flight left back — next Miss McGuirk — lived the Blomfield sisters Muriel and Millicent — stage dancers — stage sisters too, because they were n't really any relation whatever. They were the very advance guard of up-to-dateness. If hats were small, skirts short, jackets tight, blouses diaphanous, theirs would be — on any pleasant afternoon in all that crowded half-mile of the Avenue from Thirty-fourth to Forty-fourth or among all the dubious polygenetic swarms of the Rialto — the smallest, shortest, tightest, most diaphanous. They were strapping girls, very much rouged, strictly business, and beginning to get on in their profession. In the apartments in the third floor rear, just over Miss McGuirk and the Blomfields, were four young ladies, two to a flat, who were engaged in various occupations intermittently and intermittently occupied in having a good time. It was rather pleasant having them in the Kilkenny. They were all pretty, all young, all lively, and, being admirers of the Blomfield sisters, were all as small, short, tight, and diaphanous in the matter of dress as they could manage. They were always laughing and chattering and always running up or running down the stairs, never by any chance taking them at a walk.

Suddenly, after a quiet afternoon in the Kilkenny, the front door would burst open, a wave of blended voices rather sharp but cheerful would pervade the hallways, there would be a sound of running feet on the stairs, the rattling of a key in a lock, and immediately the notes of a cheap phonograph would rise in the air grinding out a turkey-trot to the accompaniment of incessant conversations, exclamations, laughter, the slamming of doors, and the rattling of dishes. When these sounds floated up or down to you, you knew that the young ladies of the third floor back were at home again.

In the two apartments of the fourth — and top floor — front, which had been knocked together at some previous time as Miss St. David now proposed doing on the second, lived Vera Wildwood — the beautiful typist — and the old man, her father. In case this should be considered unduly extravagant on their part, it may be well to explain that each flat above the ground-floor ones consisted of a sitting-room with two outside windows, a bedroom, a bathroom, and what was playfully termed by the real-estate agent a “kitchenette.” The three latter rooms opened on to a small shaft which was intended by the theorist who had built the building to supply them with light and air. The uniform price for each flat was thirty-five dollars a month, therefore Vera Wildwood and her father, having two, paid seventy. There were twelve rentable flats in the building, four on each of the second, third, and fourth floors, which, at thirty-five a month each, meant an annual rent-roll of

four thousand two hundred dollars, a ridiculously small sum for such a valuable property, hardly enough, in fact, to pay the taxes, Sid's income, and the few repairs which the tenants occasionally succeeded in wringing from the agent. Anybody would tell you that the ground alone was worth four hundred thousand dollars, but it was said that the owner was an old, decrepit gentleman waiting to die and wanting only to be let alone.

One of the sitting-rooms in this double apartment had been converted into a bedroom for Vera. One of the inside bedrooms was used as a little dining-room, the other inside bedroom was slept in by the old man, and the other sitting-room was the old man's study by day and a general lounge and sitting-room by night.

They were pretty comfortable.

There remain now only the two front apartments on the third floor and the two rear on the fourth. These were all occupied by young men, two to a flat. Each of these young men thought himself different from every other young man, but he was n't. Some of them were quiet, some noisy, some had steady jobs, some had n't, some liked going to bed early, and others retired and rose very very late with equal reluctance, but each was only one of fifty thousand others with almost identical minds, thoughts, and characteristics. That is, all but one, who was a music-mad Swiss-Alsatian, and therefore not quite the same. His name was Max Bebel. He was young, short, stout, with a smiling red face, played the violin in various theatre orchestras, gave lessons on

the piano when he had pupils to give them to, and dreamed of an operatic career embracing all the tenor rôles Wagner ever wrote. He had a piano in his flat and sang them constantly — very well too — with tremendous vigor, playing his own accompaniments. He was excessively good-natured and extremely sentimental.

The joint occupant of Max Bebel's flat was a young man who had seen better days, or at least days when he had had more money than at present: his energies at this time being devoted to making enough to pay the dues of his club which he said was the last link binding him to his glorious past. He lived precariously by selling jewelry on commission, and made the other occupants of the Kilkenny rather tired by talking too much about the people he knew. Wadham Robinson his name was. He and Max made strange bedfellows. Necessity had united them, but they got on together surprisingly well.

The six remaining young men occupying the other third floor front and the two fourth floor rear flats will be mentioned particularly if occasion requires. These people: the sisters Blomfield, the four young ladies, Vera Wildwood and her father, Max Bebel, Robinson, and the six young men totaled sixteen people, and they had all been invited to Miss St. David's farewell party to the famous young novelist Fred Filbert. To people living in the smart apartment houses farther uptown, where nobody ever knows anybody else, such promiscuity may seem inexplicable, but nobody was proud in the Kilkenny, except occasionally Robinson. When tenants of

the Kilkenny began to get proud, they got out if they could. That is what some of the young men said was the trouble with Fred Filbert. He was getting the big head.

Miss St. David, of course, had no intention of limiting her party to sixteen. When she gave a real party — and this was to be a real one — she liked to have her rooms so crowded that there were always people standing about her front door, which was always open, waiting to get in. She did n't care much who they were. She would n't have minded inviting Sid if she had n't been a Southerner and Sid a nigger. In fact Robinson said that niggers were about the only people she *did* draw the line at. And it must be confessed that she was n't at all particular. When Robinson remonstrated with her she did n't seem to understand. She and Fred Filbert had been inseparable companions. They were Bohemians of Bohemians. Always dining together at some restaurant, sometimes small, cheap ones, sometimes big, expensive ones, frequenting the cabarets, dancing, and smoking until Fred's book was accepted by the publishers, Messrs. Richmond Sons & Richmond, made a success, and brought Fred fame of sorts and more money than he had ever had before.

This had happened a year and a half ago. Fred had immediately written another, had scored another success, and the manuscript of his third had just been sent in to Richmond Sons & Richmond. He was happy. He had unexpectedly found a place at the bountifully laden table of success and was being helped plentifully to

many special dishes. His horizon began to lift. The Kil-kenny began to look small, shabby, and unattractive, as indeed it was. His transmogrified life needed another background; therefore he had been providing it.

Miss St. David hurried out at seven o'clock to get a light dinner.

It was late November; the air frostily keen, showed the lights and movements of the street with crystal clearness. A splendid exhilaration gave buoyancy to Miss St. David's step as she hurried around the corner to the little restaurant where she intended to dine. She had forgotten for the moment — as evening approached — certain forebodings which, earlier in the day, she had been unable to rid herself of. Darkness had come, and darkness to Miss St. David stood for what she craved — the night life of the city. A life compounded of the aroma of food and drink, the perfume of flowers, the pungent odor of tobacco, music, excitement, rushing about in taxis, lolling over tables, dancing, and a gliding at last, dead tired, into luxurious and dreamless sleep.

She opened the door of the little restaurant and stepped in. The room was a small one with a row of tables standing along each wall. At the end of the aisle caused by these rows a swinging door with a small pane of glass in it would burst open momentarily and a waiter would shoot through laden with dishes as if propelled from a catapult. From beyond this door a continuous

succession of sounds issued, giving the impression that if one could glance within one would witness a scene of the most intense activity. Most of the tables were occupied by couples who talked in low tones, leaning across toward each other, but one near the door was unoccupied, and she took it as the proprietor, a small blond Swiss who seemed to appear from nowhere, pulled out a chair for her.

"Bonjour, Madame!"

"Bonjour, Adolph!"

"Monsieur not coming zis evening?"

"No, Adolph. Yes, the regular dinner, Adolph, but I'm in a hurry."

"P-s-s-s-t!" with a compelling gesture to an proaching waiter. "Hors d'œuvres and consommé/ Madame!"

"And a dry Martini, Adolph!"

"Oui, Madame!" With a gesture he transferred the order to the waiter.

"And — oh, yes, Adolph — I would like two bottles of claret sent around. You know the

"Oui, Madame!" and he added, "A little"

"Yes; for the punch. I don't care for punch gives you a headache, but it's cheaper than it will help to fill in. Must you have Adolph?"

"Absolument! Much brandy!" answered

"Have n't you a recipe, Adolph?"

"Ce n'est pas nécessaire, Madame"

claret, the sugar, the ice, the lemon, and the orange juice, the brandy and the siphons, and you taste and mix and taste once more, and when it is strong and a little sweet and vairy pleasant, you vill know it is feenish! It makes people have a good time!"

"But in the morning!" — and Miss St. David made an expressive gesture.

Monsieur Adolph shrugged his shoulders. "P-s-s-s-t! Madame's fish!" And he darted across the room to pull out chairs for some new arrivals.

Miss St. David hurried back to the Kilkenny, got out of her hat, her coat, and her gloves and set to work. Sid was already on hand in the kitchen, and he and Rose were carrying on one of those ejaculatory dialogues punctuated with much laughter which makes conversation between negroes difficult to understand for any one but a Southerner.

Fred Filbert had moved out that morning, and Miss St. David — who, when she wanted to do a thing, wanted to do it at once — had had a carpenter in since early in the day cutting an opening between her sitting-room and that of the adjoining flat which had been Fred's. An immense amount of rubbish had been the result, which had only just been cleared away. The furniture of Miss St. David's sitting-room had been taken out while work progressed, and now she saw two empty rooms connected by the rough opening in the plaster. It was splendid! Here was a clear field in which to let loose her abundant energies.

"Come out of that kitchen now, you two, and get to work! Did you sweep this floor, Sid?"

Sid and Rose came smilingly out of the kitchen.

"Yes, ma'am, Ah did!" Sid answered. "Ah done sweep it gudel!" And he laughed.

"We've got to cover up the ragged edges of that opening somehow. Did the carpenter leave any of that thick paper he put down to save the floor?"

"Yes'm, dey's 'mose a roll of it in the kitchen," Rose answered. Rose laughed too.

Miss St. David started through the hall and almost fell over a basket of rubbish which had been tucked away in a corner of it.

"What's this?" she asked.

"It's 'mose too big for de dumb waiter, so Ah reckoned Ah'd take it downstairs dis evenin' when Ah go to bed," explained Sid.

"Well, you've got another guess coming! Do you suppose I want my guests fallin' downstairs and breakin' dair haid!" Miss St. David often lapsed into darky talk herself when with them. "Here you, Rose, fetch me the tack-hammer an' the tacks!"

Sid with a chuckle disappeared with the basket, and by the time he got back Miss St. David had tacked lengths of heavy floor paper neatly over the edges of the new doorway to protect the costumes of the ladies and gentlemen who would be constantly passing through it, Rose having given the floor a last scrub, had disappeared into the kitchen to finish making the sandwiches, and

the really fascinating part of the evening's preparations was at hand. Miss St. David's piano, which had not been moved, occupied the exact centre of the sitting-room wall opposite the new doorway. Against the exact centre of the other sitting-room wall — facing it — on a precise line with the centre of the piano she placed, with Sid's help, a long table and covered it with a white cloth. On the mathematical middle of this cloth she deposited the as yet empty punch-bowl — hired from the caterer Denis down the street — and flanked it with two dozen punch cups — also hired — twelve on either side. At each end of the table she placed large papier-maché trays. On each tray she stood a bottle of Scotch whiskey, the cork partially drawn, and on either side of each bottle a siphon of carbonic water. In front of the bottles and the siphons a row of six tumblers was arranged on each tray, and in front of each row of tumblers she provided a bowl — with a spoon — in which cracked ice would be placed later.

Miss St. David having got so far stepped back for a moment to admire the symmetrical beauty of her handiwork, but she set to work again immediately. Two more papier-maché trays were now placed on the table a little in front of and between the whiskey-bottle trays and the punch-bowl, and these trays each contained a box of cigars, six boxes of cigarettes, and three boxes of matches. Three plates at each end of the table were to take care of the sandwiches.

Miss St. David and Sid now began to move the furni-

ture — which had been carried out during the carpenter's labors — in again. The pieces which had occupied one room before had now to be distributed in two, which was an advantage, as it would give more room for dancing. The chairs and sofas were arranged against the walls, and on six small tables, which she assembled from throughout the flat and which she placed one beside the piano and the others in spaces between the furniture, she distributed three additional bottles of Scotch, three of rye, twelve siphons, six bowls for ice, and more cigarettes and matches. This part of her labors being accomplished, she turned on all the lights to get the effect and then departed for the kitchen — Sid following carrying the punch-bowl — to mix the punch.

On the kitchen table stood the six bottles of claret ordered from Adolph, two bottles of brandy, lemons, oranges, siphons, and sugar. Miss St. David set to work, pouring into the bowl from time to time the different ingredients; the claret for body, the siphons to give it life, the lemon juice to make it sour, the sugar to make it sweet, the orange juice to make it smooth, and the brandy to make it go to one's head, until finally, tasting it for the last time, she said: "A big piece of ice now, Rose."

"Ice!" answered Rose. "Foh de lan's sake, dey ain't no *ice*!" — as if it was ridiculous to suppose that there should be such a thing as ice about.

Miss St. David's heart sank. "No ice!" she exclaimed.

"I ain' seen no ice! You seen any ice, Sid?" And Sid answered, "I ain' see no ice!"

"You have n't got brains enough between you to fill a thimble! Did n't I tell you that the iceman was to leave double quantity to-day?"

"The iceman ain' bin roun'. He dropped a piece on his foot yesterday, Sid says!"

"But what am I to do? We *must* have ice!"

The two darkies stood uncomfortably, wearing the expressions of children who have been reprimanded, until Sid said:

"They's a man roun' the corner in Sixth Avenue's got ice fo' sale, in the cellar."

"He'll be shut up by now. It's half-past eight."

"He sleeps there," answered Sid.

"Then you take the two biggest baskets you can find and go around there, and don't you come back until you've filled them both. You almost gave me heart disease. Rose, you pour half of that punch into a pitcher to be used later and, when Sid gets back, put a big lump of ice in the bowl. If the man in the cellar has n't got it, tell Adolph he must help me out. I'm going to dress." And she went into her bedroom and closed the door.

She undid her skirt, slipped it down, and taking off her jacket and blouse looked at herself in her mirror. She was afraid that the time was fast approaching when she would have to fight for something she wanted and she was taking stock of herself. She looked at her blonde head out of her own dark, sleepy eyes, at her deep chest,

her full arms and straight and rounded throat. She was strong and beautiful of body, but was she clever enough? That was what counted in the long run. She looked at herself contemplatively for twenty seconds, and then suddenly her lips quivered, and tears flooded her eyes. She wet a corner of a towel with cold water, bathed her eyes, and then, looking in the glass again, she smiled her sleepy smile as if to encourage herself, and began to dress.

In fifteen minutes, hearing some one clumping upstairs and recognizing through long experience the heavy sound of Sid's feet, she opened the door. Sid was coming in with two large blocks of ice. She shut herself in again, but almost at once the doorbell rang. She listened. It was only Mrs. Wagstaff, her dressmaker, a jolly soul who had been asked to look on, help fill up, and to make herself generally useful, and who, in spite of being very old and stout and living somewhere in the Bronx, had been the first to arrive; but a few minutes later, as Rose was hooking the last hook of Miss St. David's dress, and as the clock was striking nine, all the doors of the Kilkenny opened simultaneously and all of the tenants, excepting Miss McGuirk and Wadham Robinson, issued from them and began descending the stairs to Miss St. David's flat, forming quite a procession — but as they reached her door they met another procession ascending from the street. Somebody rang the bell, and as it was opened by Sid, with loud guffaws of laughter about nothing at all, in the way darkies have,

full thirty people immediately found themselves in Miss St. David's flat. "Ladies to the right!" ejaculated Sid, pointing to Miss St. David's bedroom, "gemmen to the left!"

The party had begun on the minute.

CHAPTER II

No sooner had the advance guard of thirty — divested of their coats and wraps — begun to squirt carbonic water into glasses, pour out whiskey, sample the punch, and help themselves to cigarettes, than a fresh batch arrived. This was exactly what Miss St. David wanted. She liked a party to start off with a rush, and going into the new sitting-room where Mrs. Wagstaff was already comfortably seated in a corner, ready for anything, in the company of a very high highball, she started the phonograph. The phonograph had been placed next the table bearing the punch-bowl. It was Miss St. David's intention a little later to get Max to play the piano for them every once in a while, alternating with the phonograph — he played dance music so wonderfully — but she thought it better to wait until things had really got under way.

More and more people were constantly coming in, and with a knack which Miss St. David undeniably possessed she was seeing to it that they were having a good time. Two or three young ladies from a large dry-goods shop near by, who had been invited by Miss St. David because they had been in the habit of selling her things from time to time, were rather stiff because some of the young men talked to them without waiting for the ceremony of a formal introduction, but they soon caught the

spirit of the place and after that did n't mind at all. As for the others, friends of Miss St. David, acquaintances formed through chance encounters in restaurants and at tango tea-rooms, they made themselves at home immediately. Four of the six young men — the other two had just moved in a day or two before, and had come in response to a note of invitation from Miss St. David who had got their names from Sid — made instantaneous advances to the four young ladies. Their acquaintance heretofore having been restricted to pleasantries exchanged on the stairs, witticisms in falsetto by the young men, shafts of sarcasm in return; but these skirmishes were now abandoned. The other two young men, the new arrivals, were about the only people present who did n't seem to feel at home. One of them was very tall and slender, grotesquely so almost, with a thin beak of a nose almost always carried in the air as if he were noticing some odor somewhere about his head, a shock of intensely black hair, and an expression of dissatisfied preoccupation. The other was short and thick-set, with a ruddy face, light hair, and pleasant blue eyes. They were standing awkwardly in a corner and the tall one was saying querulously:

"Ain't the celebrity here yet?"

"How should I know? I never saw him! Let's get out!"

"Not until I've seen the fool," answered the tall one.

"They say a hundred thousand copies of 'Dictionary Dan' have been sold, and I'm going to find out how he does it."

"Read the book, that'll show you!"

"I've tried!"

"Well, it is n't bad, really."

"It's neither bad nor good; its mediocrity is so complete that there's nothing to be said about it. It does n't deserve a line of recognition from any self-respecting critic. He is n't a writer, he simply happens to be one of Destiny's darlings. Fate would have handed him out pie instead of hard-tack no matter *what* he'd tried his luck at. There are a few of these monsters always about, and I want to see what one looks like. Lord, Ted, would n't I like to be King of the Earth for a while. Do you know what I'd do with this roomful, for instance? Fasten 'em into wire baskets and drop 'em into the bay!"

Ted laughed indulgently. "That's no way for the coming American novelist to talk. How do you expect to get types? You must learn to understand, to sympathize, to enter into the lives of every class of society."

"Rot!" answered the other. "Do you suppose I've got to come here to find out about these people? What they do, what they say, what they think? Nonsense! I know it already."

This conversation had taken place during a lull in which the phonograph was being wound up again.

"What are those young men doing over there?" asked the watchful Miss St. David of the sisters Blomfield who happened to be standing beside her.

"Who? Where?" asked Muriel.

"Over there in the corner! The tall one and the short one!"

"Oh, *them* fellers! Oh, they're handing each other a line of high-brow talk as near as I could make out. Steve thought he heard 'em insulting the party and was going to call 'em down!"

"Well, you tell Steve from me that if there's any calling down to be done here I'll do it myself. Come along, I'm going to introduce you!"

A number of the guests, catching a phrase here and there and realizing that a conversation was going on in the corner utterly different in character from anything ever heard in the neighborhood of Broadway, had naïvely stopped to listen.

"How is it," the tall young man was saying, "that you, a young Harvard poet, class of 1912, can't understand that while some natures to gain experience must go in search of it, it comes to others sitting still. These are the mystics. You are a poet, therefore you ought to be one too, but God help you, I don't believe you are. You are a mole instead; to know things, instead of flying, you burrow!"

"Never!" cried Ted.

"Yes, by Jove, you do; you're a mole!"

Just then a young man, rather flushed and not too steady on his feet, who, according to Broadway ideals might have been considered handsome, touched Ted on the shoulder, saying pleadingly:

"Don't let him put it over you like that!"

"What's that!" cried Ted's companion; "speak English; I can't understand you."

"Who's talking to *yeaow!*" returned the other with intense scorn. "I say he's smaller than you and —"

"Sid!" cried a rich, compelling voice just behind them, "get Mr. Steve's overcoat. He needs some fresh air. Take a walk, Steve, and come back some time next week! Is this Mr. Watergate?" — Miss St. David addressed the tall young man — "and this is Mr. Blakie, I suppose. Let me make you acquainted with the Miss Blomfields — they live in the Kilkenny too." Mr. Blakie was plainly pleased to meet them, but Watergate shook hands bashfully and seemed to be contemplating a retreat, whereupon Millicent, who understood that she had a duty to perform, remarked encouragingly:

"Steady on, Vivian! Nobody's going to hurt you. Have you tried the punch?"

"I don't drink," answered Watergate.

"Nobody said you did. Come and have a glass. It'll do you good. Take my arm like a real gentleman and we'll steer a course for the punch-bowl."

Watergate in his confusion, instead of offering his arm, took hers, and followed by Muriel and Blakie, they marched through the new doorway.

"Who's the groom, Mill?" called one of the third floor young ladies, at which Miss Blomfield gave way, for a moment, to mirth.

"We do look like a wedding procession and no mistake, Vivian. Where do *you* come from?"

"I don't come from anywhere," answered Mr. Watergate, a little indignantly.

"Just what I thought," answered Millicent, "but you need n't get mad at me about it. It was n't my fault. What's your business?"

"It seems to me," said Watergate, "that this conversation is rather one-sided."

"Whose side, yours or mine?"

"Yours."

"Well, who's to blame for that? Here, get outside of this, it may help your powers of repartee!" And she filled one of the punch-glasses and handed it to him.

Watergate took it submissively and drank its contents. On the other side Blakie was helping his companion and then himself with a certain reprehensible eagerness. Watergate looked at Millicent. What a handsome girl, he thought. Of course not — well, *very* theatrical, but handsome none the less.

"One's enough for the present," she remarked as he put down his glass. "Two might go to your head."

Watergate looked at her defiantly, and after a moment's hesitation drank another cupful.

"Naughty! Naughty!" cried Miss Blomfield.

"I say!" Watergate remonstrated, "I'm going to get out. I don't like being guyed!"

"Well, don't hang out a sign inviting it, then," answered Miss Blomfield good-naturedly. "It does n't go in the Kilkenny."

"In the what?" Watergate asked.

"The Kilkenny! That's the name this apartment house is known by to the tenants. To outsiders it's only a number. Mr. Bebel" — to Max, who had come up for a glass of punch — "Mr. Watergate!"

"Such handsome vimmens here to-night!" exclaimed Max, almost immediately, as he stood stroking his blond beard. "Let me show you vun — a regular case — !" And he indicated a lady in the other sitting-room fairly bursting with opulent Hebraic charms.

"Say! Rubens was n't a circumstance to you!" answered Miss Blomfield. "What's her name?"

"I do not know, but ve have been flirting," announced Max proudly; "such a handsome voman —"

"I'll get Miss St. David to introduce you."

"Nein! Nein!" cried Max hastily; "to flirt is more interesting. Ah, but she is a case!" — Miss St. David was beckoning to him with one hand and pointing at the piano stool with the other — "you vatch. If she can flirt, I too can." He walked quickly across the room, very erect with protruding chest, and, seizing a moment when the Hebraic lady's head was turned so that she would n't notice, he quickly cast a killing glance in her direction. As he sat down on the piano stool he turned and looked at Miss Blomfield and at Watergate out of the corner of a roguish eye, as if to say, "Dit you see me?"

"My! Ain't he a devil!" said Miss Blomfield.

"You mentioned Rubens just now," remarked Watergate. "Were you referring to Peter Paul?"

"I was referring to the painter who always seemed to like big fat women. Come along now! Max is going to play, and when he does, it takes a stone image to keep from dancing."

"But I don't dance!"

"Of course, you dance! You can't help dancing when Max plays. Do you suppose I am going to hold down a chair the whole evening? Come now!"

Watergate got up smiling ruefully.

"Don't worry; you'll get along all right." And she called across the room, "Do give us a one-step, Max!"—and Max, nodding, began.

"Now!" said Miss Blomfield, "the nice thing about the one-step is that you can dance it any old way. Only just keep time to the music. Go ahead! I'll follow."

Nobody could play dance music the way Max could. With a strong, sure touch he began to throw out into Miss St. David's room—from the mahogany upright at which he sat—with a poetic precision which was peculiarly Max's, pulsating coils of swinging, swaying sound. Threw them out, overlapping, sinking down, swooning back and forth, rocking to and fro until—if you did n't dance—you rocked too. Everybody at Miss St. David's party began to do something. If they were n't dancing, they were, as has been said, rocking, rocking to and fro; if they were n't rocking, they were keeping time with their heads; if they were n't nodding their heads, they were singing; if they were n't singing, they were whistling; if they were n't whistling they were

waving their cigarettes. Auntie Wagstaff was waving her highball glass, partly to keep time and partly because she thought it might call somebody's attention to the fact that it needed refilling — everybody simply *had* to do something when Max played dance music. Some of them were doing several things at once. Miss St. David's rooms were full of the wonderful rhythm of Max's playing and of a dancing, rocking, nodding, singing, and whistling company.

Peter Watergate had never in his life experienced such delightful sensations as he was enjoying just at that moment. After a few preliminary collisions he got the hang of it, and, having a sense of time and being not ungraceful, before he knew it he was in the swing; but presently he knew, too, that Miss Blomfield was doing most of it. Peter had his arm around her waist, but she had hers around his. It was Miss Blomfield who, dexterously avoiding the other dancers, guided his steps while seeming to yield to them. He experienced with agreeable surprise the supple movements of her strong and buoyant body. His respect for her began to rise. One must admire people who do things well even if it is only dancing.

"She is more muscular than I am," he thought. "She must be as wonderful at it as Max is in playing for it. — Do you know how I feel?" he said. "I feel as if I were in the arms of a beautiful mermaid, and that we were floating together on a sea of music over entrancing billows of sound."

It is unknown what retort this rather flowery compliment might have drawn from Miss Blomfield because as she opened her mouth to reply — the slightly sarcastic curl of her lip indicating that whatever it was, *it* was not to be complimentary in turn — some one bumped into Peter so vigorously that they were obliged to stop.

Miss Blomfield's lips curved suddenly into a smile and she exclaimed over Peter's shoulder: "Good-evening, Vera. Well, look who's here! Mr. Wildwood, dancing!"

"With Max at the piano? Nobody's too old for it then; and that's what I suppose you meant." And Mr. Wildwood, looking like an older and milder edition of Bernard Shaw, smiled at her teasingly.

"Pass it on!" remarked Miss Blomfield nonchalantly — a retort which seemed to delight Mr. Wildwood. "Oh, excuse *me*, Vera; let me introduce Mr. Watertight. He *can* pay the loveliest compliments!"

"*Watergate*, please," answered Peter, blushing again, "and if that compliment *was* stupid it was sincere at any rate." And he shook hands with Mr. Wildwood and with Vera, the beautiful typist, his daughter.

"Ask Miss Wildwood to dance," suggested Miss Blomfield; "you can get along all right now. Hurry up, you've just got time for a little one."

There was nothing much for Peter to do except to obey orders, but after a moment he found that he could n't get on at all, and he and Miss Wildwood sat down together.

"I got along all right with Miss Blomfield," he explained.

"No wonder," answered Vera. "You know who she is, don't you?"

"No, I don't."

"Have n't you seen 'The Spyglass'? She and her sister dance in it."

"Well, what an ass! What an absolute ass I am! Why, they're wonderful in it! Of course I remember them. Acrobatic dancing I should call it, but different from most in that it was poetically graceful. Is she a friend of yours?"

"We're all friends here."

"You live here, then!"

"Yes with my father. I saw you when you were moving in. Something got stuck on the stairs and they could n't move it one way or the other."

"That was our work table. My chum's and mine. We work on it."

"Work on it — ?"

"Write. We each write."

"Really! I always like to meet people who write."

Peter was beginning to wonder about Miss Wildwood. She talked like a lady.

"Yes. He works at one end of it and I at the other. We have a little curtain hanging across the middle so that we can't see each other."

Miss Wildwood laughed. "And what do you write?" she asked.

"My friend has always written poetry, but he is trying his hand at a short story now."

"And you?"

He hesitated a moment and blushed again — the second time since he had been introduced to her. "Different things," he said at last; "plays — a novel! By the way, is Filbert here?"

"No, not yet," answered Miss Wildwood.

At this moment some one came up and asked Miss Wildwood to dance. Peter looked around him. Blakie was prancing about with one of the young ladies from the large dry-goods shop. Max, who was n't playing now, was dancing with his (Peter's) Miss Blomfield, and Steve was being escorted out a second time. He had gone when invited to by Miss St. David, but had just come in again unsteadier than ever. The other Miss Blomfield was sitting with Auntie Wagstaff and Mr. Wildwood, and the brassy beat of the phonograph stirring Peter's blood a little he went over and asked her to dance. She proved not quite as likable to Peter as the other — in spite of the fact that she did n't guy him — but an even better teacher. By the time the music stopped and he had had two more cupfuls of punch he had begun to feel that he was enjoying himself. Somehow time was beginning to run faster than usual. Everybody laughed, talked, danced, and whirled about, more rapidly than before. He was sure that the sixty seconds which go to make up a minute were being ticked off in half a minute's time. All the young men in their white

evening waistcoats — purchased at three dollars and a quarter from Sixth-Avenue haberdashers — were whirling their partners more rapidly than ever. Every little while when Max, who was playing again, emphasized a beat, fifty pairs of feet would stamp the floor — Biff! Bing! — to help him mark the time. Max was openly ogling the Hebraic lady right before her husband, a very small man who did n't seem to mind, the punch-bowl had run dry, and Sid, who was going about bursting out every once in a while into loud guffaws of foolish darky laughter, had just filled it up again. How he would have loved to do a buck dance right out in the middle of the parlor floor. "Dat Mistah Max he can sho play!" he was saying to himself. Old Auntie Wagstaff had plainly had too much and was smiling with difficulty at everybody with eyes which somehow seemed to have got themselves crossed, and two or three of the young men had decided to sit down and were knocking the ashes from their cigarettes into imaginary ash trays.

The policeman had called Miss St. David out a moment before to say that Steve had been telling him that the place ought to be pulled. Authority in America being a thing to evade, hoodwink, or purchase, Miss St. David replied that Steve was a yellow pup and gave the policeman a handful of cigars and a good stiff drink of rye. The policeman thereupon disappeared for the remainder of the night, which was lucky, because not five minutes later a servant from one of the clubs — the one a mem-

ber of which had tried to speak to Miss St. David a few nights before — came out in search of him to complain of the sounds of vulgar revelry issuing from Miss St. David's flat.

In this very club at that very time sat Wadham Robinson with two friends, but it was neither Robinson nor his friends who had sent the servant out on his search for the policeman; rather was it one of those not uncommon people who are irritated at the spectacle of common people enjoying themselves. And, of course, to the members of Robinson's club this would be considered a hopelessly common party. Robinson thought it was and yet he rather wanted to go to it. From where he and his friends sat could be seen, diagonally across the way, the four blazing windows of Miss St. David's two sitting-rooms. These windows were all open, and they could hear choruses of laughter, loud exclamations, singing, and the sounds of a phonograph alternating with those of a piano. Besides, figures could be seen constantly shifting in front of them, a continuous whirling about. All at once, after a short interval of silence, the piano started something different, a hurrying, tripping something played pianissimo, and keeping time with it they began to notice the patter of feet. Robinson leaned forward.

"Lord!" he said, "they've got Sid up there dancing a buck dance."

There was a cheer, loud clapping of hands, a confusion of voices, and presently the piano started off

again and they could see the couples whirling past the windows more rapidly than ever.

"Who's Sid?" asked one of Robinson's friends.

"Our janitor. I live over there."

"Well, it sounds like some party. How was it that you did n't get an invitation?"

"Oh, I got it all right. I was wondering whether I'd go or not. Nothing but a lot of muckers."

"Let's all go. You take us. It might be fun." This from the younger of Robinson's two companions, almost a boy in fact. The older one, who was n't very old either, made a movement as if to get up.

"I'm going home," he said; "it's getting late."

"Oh, come along," urged the boy; "it's early yet. Whose party is it?"

"It's a farewell party to Fred Filbert the novelist. One of the tenants is giving it to him because he's just moving out. Ever hear of him?"

"I've heard of him," answered the older man. "We publish his books. In fact he's lunching with me to-morrow."

"Well, then it would n't be decent for us *not* to go," returned the boy. "Come along, Charles!"

"We have n't been asked yet," answered Richmond.

"Oh, I'll take you if you want to go. Beastly lot of muckers, that's all."

It had grown so late that no guests had ascended the stairs to Miss St. David's flat for upwards of an hour, therefore the arrival of three young men in white waistcoats noticeably different from those purchased

from the Sixth-Avenue haberdashers attracted a good deal of attention and resulted in three mild sensations. In the first place, the moment the small, dapper Mr. Charles Richmond caught sight of Miss St. David bearing down on them, he turned pale, seemed about to make for the door, and involuntarily rubbed his right ear as if a certain robust box on it still smarted, but being reassured by Miss St. David's welcoming manner, which gave no indication that she had ever seen him before, his self-possession returned quickly. In the second, Auntie Wagstaff, feeling that she simply must lie down somewhere, had stolen into the nearest room — which happened to be the gentlemen's dressing-room — and had gone to sleep on the bed. The light was burning dimly there, and Robinson and his friends without noticing anything, had each thrown his overcoat on the bed where it had landed on Auntie Wagstaff's head. A moment later, while they were shaking hands with Miss St. David, smothered shouts issued from the gentlemen's dressing-room, of such an alarming nature that festivities were suspended, while everybody who could squeezed into it. Auntie Wagstaff had been wakened out of a sound sleep by a sense of rapid suffocation. She was lifted off the bed where, to the consternation of their owners, it was discovered that she had been lying on four silk hats, and removed to the kitchen to be looked after by Rose. The third sensation consisted only in the two friends of Robinson — the very young man and young Richmond the publisher — coming face

to face with Vera Wildwood at the same moment, and each exclaiming with expressions of bewildered surprise, "Why, Vera!" — whereupon Vera looked embarrassed and annoyed by turns.

"And there's Uncle John!" exclaimed the younger one.

"Do be quiet, Tim!" cried Vera, and she led him into a corner.

"Mind you don't tell Edith!" was the first thing she said.

"Why not?" asked Tim. "Charles will!"

"Ask him not to!"

"All right, but he'll tell her all the same!"

"Yes, I suppose there's no help for it now!" said Vera with a sigh. "How did you happen to come here, Tim?"

"I was with Robinson and Charles at the club," answered Tim with a shade of pride in his tone. "Robinson brought us."

"The *club*! What club?" — and Vera laughed.

"The Lucullus, of course. I'm twenty-one! Charles got me elected. Snappiest in town. Say, Vera, are n't you and Uncle John ever coming back to grandfather's?"

"No, Tim, we're not. I'm much happier living this way with something to do, than I ever was before. Father is too!"

"Something to do! Have you really got a job? I never thought you really would, you know!" Tim seemed rather disturbed.

"Now, Tim, don't be a snob. There are enough of them in the family already."

"Charles *is* an ass about some things," answered Tim reflectively. "Where do you live, Vera?"

"Will you promise not to tell?"

"Right-o!"

"Here!"

"In this flat?"

"No, in this house. It belongs to grandfather, you know."

"Does *he* know?"

"Of course he does; he offered it to us."

"The foxy old top! *He's* kept mum about it!"

"He promised he would; and that was n't respectful, Tim. That's the sort of thing Charles would say. Don't you do it, Tim!"

"All right. May I come and see you, Vera?"

"Perhaps! I'll let you know."

Mr. Peter Watergate came up at that moment, looked superciliously over Tim's head, and asked Miss Wildwood if she would mind trying it again.

"Of course you dance, Tim. Ask anybody. Nobody stands on ceremony here" — and off she went. Tim promptly followed her advice and was presently rotating with one of the large dry-goods shop young ladies. He, Robinson, and Charles, after the prominence their late appearance gave them, soon found themselves on a level with everybody else. The fact that their white waistcoats were superlatively smarter than any of the

others made not the slightest difference, and they found that if they were willing to enjoy themselves everybody was willing to meet them more than halfway.

The punch now having given out, the whiskey bottles and the siphons of carbonic never had a moment's rest. "There vill be some headaches in the morning," the small husband of the opulent Hebraic lady observed, turning unsteadily around in search of her, but she was dancing the tango at that moment with the correct Mr. Charles and did n't hear him. Max's playing had so fascinated everybody that some one had thrown the phonograph needles out of the window, and he was sticking manfully to the piano, stopping only long enough to wipe his red, perspiring face, until all at once at the end of a dance he made a fearful crescendo ending in a tremendous bang and said that he could play no more.

"Please, Max! Good old Max! Don't stop now, Max!" Everybody almost was calling everybody else by his first name by this time.

"No!" cried Max, "it is tree o'clock. Ve must go now to bed!"

"Just one more, Max. Like a good feller, Max. We'll do something for you some day, Max!"

"Vell!" agreed Max at last, "joost vone more. But only vone!"

"All right, Max."

"Vait!" cried the little Jew husband — "a trink all around!"

In an instant glasses were seized, whiskey poured into them, carbonic squirted.

"Now; all togedder. To Miss St. Davit for a nice party!" cried the little Jew.

Three cheers were given with a will, the glasses emptied, and Max started off again.

Max in the kindness of his heart made this last dance twice as long as any of the others and almost twice as fast. Never was anything like it. Auntie Wagstaff staggered out to look at it, while Sid and Rose were dancing a private breakdown in the kitchen. Couples were whirling like mad. Young men would leave their partners, do a few fancy steps, stamping their feet with such vigor that the bachelor sleepers in the Lucullus across the way started up in alarm, and then seizing them would whirl them round again. Everybody was singing, whistling, rocking, nodding, or waving more relentlessly than ever until, with two tremendous crescendos and two fearful bangs, Max stopped and the party was over. But every one had completely forgotten, for the moment at least — except Miss St. David — that the guest of honor, Fred Filbert, had not appeared at all.

CHAPTER III

It is true that the absence of Dora's guest of honor had hardly been noticed amid the whirl and gaiety of the evening's festivities, but the next morning, as was bound to happen, the Kilkennyites began to ask questions of one another. Some of the Kilkennyites had steady jobs, which required their getting up at the usual time, but for the others the word "morning" must be accepted in a figurative sense, most of them taking luncheon in their bathrobes.

Everybody resented Fred's absence; Wadham Robinson among the others. Wadham could n't hold any liquor to speak of, and always got up the next morning in an irritable frame of mind.

"What'd you suppose he stayed away for, anyway?" he demanded of Max.

Max was shaving at the bureau and Wadham's voice — his head was in the basin under the cold-water tap — sounded hollowly in the room.

"Vell; annodder engagement — maybe!"

"Engagement be damned! He could have telephoned, could n't he? I guess if Richmond is n't too good for Dora St. David's parties, Filbert need n't think *he* is! For two cents, I'd punch his damned snoot for him!"

"You said you would not yourself come!" observed Max placidly.

"What if I did? The party was n't given for *me*, was it? If anybody gave *me* a party, I'd break my neck to get to it or let them know the reason why! I'm a gentleman, I am! He never sent Dora St. David any word at all! Filthy mucker! Be hanged if I *don't* punch his snoot the next time I see him!"

"You vill feel better soon!" answered Max. He had finished shaving and had washed his face. Putting on his collar and tie, he sat down in his shirt-sleeves at his piano, and burst immediately into "Walther's Prize Song," making the air quiver with the vibrations of his powerful voice.

Wadham withdrew his head from the basin and stood erect.

"Shut up!" he shouted angrily, and seizing a sofa cushion, he launched it at Max's head. "Nobody has any right to a digestion like you've got! Singing like that on an empty stomach after last night!"

Max warded off the cushion, and rose. "I vill get my breakfast."

"Not here!" remonstrated Wadham; "I could n't stand it! Go down and see if Millicent and Muriel won't give you some!"

"Goot!" answered Max, and putting on his coat he went down and knocked at the Blomfields' door, which was opened by Muriel.

"Oh, come in, Max," she said; "want some breakfast? I suppose Wadham's suffering from a bad case of katzenjammer, eh?"

"Am I too late, yes?" asked Max.

"Just in time, and afterwards we're off to the show. Matinée day, you know! Mill, put on two more eggs for Max!"

"Well! What do you think of the gentlemanly conduct of Mr. Fred Filbert?" asked Muriel when all three were seated at table.

"Outracheous!" answered Max. "Vadham says he vill his nose punch!"

"Wadham will change his mind when he's feeling better, but I wish *somebody* would! Poor Dora! Taking all that trouble about his book, too!"

"Well, of course," remarked Millicent, "Dora's too easy-going."

"She is a lady," said Max.

"Yes, she is," answered Muriel, "and she don't know any more how to handle a man like Fred Filbert than I would a rhinoceros."

"You don't want to handle a man like him," observed Millicent, "you want to club him!"

"But vy 'handle' anybody?" Max asked. "If I do not like a person, I do not see them!"

"You're not a woman!" answered Millicent. "Besides, suppose you *did* like them and they treated you like dirt!"

"I have known that, too!" said Max; whereat Muriel replied, "I believe you!"—and both girls laughed, causing Max to blush deeply.

Millicent slapped him on the shoulder.

"Never mind, Maxy, you'll have a girl some day, all your own!"

"Ah-hah!" exclaimed Max. "You think I cannot flirt with vimmens! Dit you see me last night carrying on mit that handsome lady, Ickelheimer's wife?"

"She's old enough to be your mother!"

"Bud handsome!" replied Max with conviction.

"Well, if you like that kind! *I* don't!"

"What kind do you like?"

"My kind, and Millicent's, of course!" And waving her arms in the air, Muriel made a movement as if she were about to put one around Max's neck.

Max blushed, dodged, sprang up bashfully, and cried, laughing hysterically:

"Nein! Nein!"

Muriel caught him by the sleeve and Millicent exclaimed, "Sit down, Max! She's only teasing you! Finish your coffee!" And Max sat down as Muriel got up to answer a knock. It was Dora, immaculate as usual.

"It was the loveliest party, Dora!" cried Millicent at once; "and, by the way, Isaacs, the manager of our theatre, gave Muriel and me a box for to-night — first time on record, the stingy blighter! — and we want you to go, and Max, and Vera, and — and —"

Millicent was wondering whether she had better suggest Fred, when Dora broke in with —

"Why not ask Mr. Watergate and Mr. Blakie? They're so nice!"

Muriel made a face, half-humorous, half-sarcastic.

"They're nice all right! The nicest things I've ever seen!"

"They are n't either, Muriel! It's just their manner!" Millicent remonstrated.

"Oh, I don't mind nice people, believe *me!* *They* know how to behave, *they* do! I'll bet if those fellers accepted an invitation to a party, they're so nice they'd go to it! They're almost too nice, *I* think, but they ain't cheap, anyway, like some people I know!"

Dora flushed faintly, and Millicent cut in:

"Will you ask Vera if she can go to-night, Dora? We've got to beat it for the theatre and have n't time! And Max will see Watergate and Blakie, and ask them, eh, Max? Will you be in about five, Dora? We'll come in and see what luck you've had. If you have n't had any, we can do some telephoning then, and try to get somebody else!"

Muriel and Millicent had been getting into their coats, and all four presently stood on the landing. Millicent locked the door, and she and Muriel ran downstairs; Dora ascended on her way to Vera's, and Max, taking two steps, knocked at one of the third-floor front flats. Its door was presently opened by Peter Watergate. His hair was tousled, and he held in one hand a collar and cravat. He looked at Max challengingly at first, but Max's face shone so pleasantly with health and good nature, that Peter's own expression changed and he asked him to come in. Ted Blakie was just putting the coffee-pot on the table, and the aroma of frying eggs —

frying very greasily — filled the flat. Max delivered his message.

“Why, yes! We’d be delighted!” answered Peter. “Eh, Ted?” Ted assented. “Won’t you have some breakfast?”

Max hesitated. He had an active appetite, and the coffee smelt alluringly.

“Vell, I haf just had a couple of eggs with Muriel and Millicent!”

“Two eggs is nothing. Fry two more, will you, Ted!”

Ted came in with Max’s eggs and sat down, saying: “We had a corking time last night. It was bang up of Miss St. David to ask us! Practically our first night, too!”

“She’s a lady,” said Max as he had before.

“But where was Filbert?” asked Peter. “He never came at all, did he?”

“No. Everybody is mad with him. They say that since he is a success, he does not vant to come here any more. But no, I cannot believe it! And Miss St. David helped him with his books!”

“She’s very nice!” observed Peter; adding, “Who is she?”

Max shrugged his shoulders.

“She is Miss St. David! Ve like people here or ve do not like them, for themselves alone, and ve like Miss St. David. Everybody knows that my father is a tailor at Basle, because I choose to tell them, but if I did not choose, it vould no difference make.”

Peter accepted this as a rebuke, but Max had delivered it with such a pleasant smile, and with such obvious consideration, that he could n't feel offended.

Max continued:

"That is vy ve haf not Filbert liked. Ve haf no celebrated peoples here, and no rich peoples, so Filbert was never friendly with us — only with Miss St. David. But no, I must not say so! It may be that he did not care for us. I haf not the right to assume that it was because ve vere not celebrated or rich peoples. I haf no evidence on which to base that statement!"

"It's probably a fact, all right, whether you've got the evidence or not."

"Perhaps! But it was not nice, his not coming to the party! Did you not think Mrs. Ickelheimer a very handsome lady?"

"Corking!" replied Ted. "But to my mind, Miss St. David was the handsomest woman there. What do you say, Peter?"

"She's handsome," answered Peter, "but if there had been a prize, I think I'd have awarded it to Miss Millicent Blomfield!"

"There were many pretty vimmens there!" remarked Max with the air of a serious connoisseur.

"There were!" Ted assented. "And Miss Vera Wildwood need n't take a back seat for anybody either! Well, here's hoping that Miss St. David gives another one soon!"

Dora had found Vera at home, and had delivered the

Blomfield invitation. Vera accepted. Vera and her father were recent tenants at the Kilkenny, and she did not feel that she knew Dora well. She was attracted to her, and she already knew that she was reputed to have a history. No one else had one at the Kilkenny so far as anybody knew, and if they had it would have aroused no interest whatever, and it was a high tribute to Dora's personality, that while her reticence invested her past with all sorts of remarkable rumors, there were none that did more than excite a kind of expectant speculation. The expectation of a history, if the truth were known, which could not be other than dashing and romantic, except for occasional dark prognostications by Miss McGuirk, which nobody took seriously.

After Vera had accepted the Blomfields' invitation, she asked abruptly:

"Where on earth was Mr. Filbert last night?"

"I don't know!" answered Dora.

Vera's indignation got the better of her discretion, as it had a way of doing.

"It's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of in my life! Did n't he send you a note, or telephone, or something?"

She would have gone on, but all at once she noticed Dora's expression, and it told her as plainly as speech could have, that Fred had stayed away as a deliberate rebuff.

"Well," she went on after a moment, rather lamely, "such things often seem inexplicable when they are n't

at all. He'll probably come around to-day with a perfectly good reason for not getting here!"

She stopped again, knowing that she had already said too much and feeling that there was certainly no reason why she should take upon herself the task of reassuring Dora; and to change the subject she said:

"By the way! We have another novelist in the house! Mr. Watergate!"

"Really!" replied Dora. "What has he — ?"

"He has n't had anything published yet, but he told me last night, toward the end of the party, that his first book had just been accepted. I think it must have been the punch, because at first he did n't seem inclined to talk about himself!"

Dora laughed. "Can you tell me how children like that can write books? What do they know about life?"

"Is there so much to learn about it?" asked Vera. "I'm going to write one myself some day, perhaps."

"You're a child, too!"

"I mean it!" answered Vera. "I have n't been able to find out anything so very mysterious or so very stupendous about life. It seems to me that it is made up of the workings of a lot of very primitive instincts, just as language is made up of simple things like the letters in the alphabet, and that when you know *them*, the rest is easy!"

"Or like the notes of the octave; and yet all music is embraced in them," answered Dora. "Very simple, perhaps, but perhaps very complex."

"Then the thing to do, I suppose, is to keep it simple."

"We're always trying to," answered Dora, "but we don't succeed."

Vera laughed shortly.

"Are we! I know people whose purpose in life seems to be to complicate it as much as possible. I was thinking of my cousin's wife for one. My cousin, Charles Richmond, who came last night with Mr. Robinson, and with Cousin Tim, his younger brother."

"You're cousins! Really?"

"Yes; I'll tell you about them some day." Vera stretched luxuriously. "You know, I could n't work to-day! Gaiety quite unsettles me. I'm glad we're going to the theatre to-night. I should have had to do something!"

"You're restless," answered Dora. "Come and have a cup of tea with me at five."

"I like her," said Vera to herself after Dora had gone. "She's very attractive. Much superior to Fred Filbert! It's rather pathetic the way he treated her. He must be *very* common!"

In addition to the comments on Fred's behavior already recorded, others might have been, because all the young ladies of the two third-floor back flats, and, following their example, the entire lot of miscellaneous young men, condemned Fred in no uncertain language. Fred, as he might have expressed it himself, "was in bad" at the Kilkenny.

CHAPTER IV

UNCONSCIOUS of these strictures, Fred Filbert lay that same morning in the middle of his wide new brass bed, gazing lazily about him, taking in point by point the superbly scientific modern contrivances of his new demesne; new not to him alone, but actually so, since its owners, a concern which gambled in real estate, had only just completed it. Point by point Fred's eye took them all in. From the centre of the ceiling was suspended by three chains a round saucer-shaped dish. The agent had said it was of alabaster, and Fred, who knew no more about alabaster than about the Feast of the Three Kings, had accepted this statement as gospel. The convex surface of this bowl was ornamented with an arabesque of leaves wretchedly crude in character, while the concave side, which faced the ceiling, served to conceal the electric bulbs which illuminated the room. When you turned them on a brilliant, even, white radiance, caused by the light rays being shot up against the white ceiling from the alabaster bowl, and then being shot down again, flooded every corner of the room. There were no other lights because actually no others were needed. You could see as well to read or to tie your cravat in one part of the room as another. You could perceive no actual point of light and yet the room was flooded with it. Fred thought it one of the cleverest

things he had ever seen. To some people this absolutely uniform, characterless, all-pervading illumination, this absence of shaded points of light here and there, lights that you could draw up to comfortably to read or to reflect by, of others which when a brilliant glare was needed could be snapped on or off immediately, this absence of shadows, of modelling, would have been intolerable, but Fred thought it very fine. It was the latest thing, which was enough for Fred.

Fred's glance now rested on a small instrument at one side of the door leading to the bathroom, which looked like a thermometer. It *was* a thermometer, but it was more than a thermometer. It was an ingenious contrivance to regulate the heat of Fred's rooms. If you slid a needle which ran in a numbered groove beside the thermometer until it pointed to seventy, for instance, the temperature of the room, no matter what it had been before, would presently register seventy degrees. The thermometer was placed there to prove it. It was a splendid idea! You could have your room as cool or as cosy as you liked. Fred had experimented with it all the previous afternoon and had not succeeded in changing the temperature by so much as even a quarter of a degree, but he had not lost faith. It was so new, so up-to-date that it *must* be splendid. After regarding caressingly for a few seconds this new proof of the illimitable inventive genius of man, Fred considered for a moment the tremendous stride which the telephone company had made in the size and shape of their tele-

phones. Instead of the old, elongated black-walnut atrocity he saw now a neat square little ebony box fixed to the wall — to be sure, the hook was still there on which the three telephone books, city, suburban, and business, were always suspended — with their loops so inextricably entangled that in lifting one off the other two invariably fell to the floor — but it was undeniably much handsomer, and no doubt human ingenuity would find some substitute for the hook in time. Fred possessed to an unexpected degree the credulity and optimism of the real child of nature.

One or two additional scientific treasures clamored for Fred's attention, but he determined to get up before responding to their call, and before getting up he lay luxuriously on his back for a moment enjoying the sensation of muscles healthily relaxed, his head resting on the palms of his hands, the slipped-back sleeves of his nightshirt showing two big wrists.

He was about twenty-eight. His hair grew too luxuriantly, and his face, which showed a good color, was one of those thick, rather hard, faces one sees so often in America, and which are becoming — although they used not to be — more generally than any other, the American type, a type apparently of mixed and obscure origins. To accuse Fred of having a hard face may perhaps be being too hard on him, because it had mitigating points — a ready smile, an infectious laugh, and sound white teeth. He lay there, a big, strong fellow, but for the age of twenty-eight he was heavier than he

ought to be, and the bedclothes covering his abdomen rose in a perceptible mound. It was the spectacle of this mound that suddenly galvanized him into activity, for the instant his eyes chanced to rest on it he tore aside the bedclothes, leaped out, and seizing a pair of Indian clubs began putting them through a series of complicated gyrations. His bedroom at the Kilkenny had been too small for this exercise, but he had discovered that by standing sideways between the foot of the bed and the bureau in his new quarters he had plenty of lateral room to go through with it. The spaces, however, between his back and the foot of the bed and between himself and the bureau before him were so circumscribed as to require a very nice precision, and presently, having slightly deflected the orbit of one of his clubs, it struck him a smart blow on the shoulder blade as it swung past his back, causing him to swear copiously. Abandoning this form of exercise, he now proceeded to the execution of another by lying flat on his face on the floor with the palms of his hands pressed against it, at his sides, and his elbows raised in the air. In this manœuvre the body, held perfectly rigid, and resting on the toes and the hands, was to be raised until the arms were straight.

Fred now essayed this feat only to find, to his chagrin, that it was beyond him. Time was when he had done it easily, but now he could not lift his stomach from the floor until he had succumbed to the weak compromise of dividing the exercise into two parts, lifting the upper

half of his body first, by bending it at the waist — a method dead against the rules.

The blow received by the Indian club and his inability to properly perform the lifting exercise having disinclined him to further efforts, he rose now to his feet and, as if to mitigate his disappointment, he threw on a bathrobe, crossed his sitting-room, entered a pantry, and opening the door of a refrigerator which filled a recess, gazed into the ice-chamber. Hidden away in this chamber was the apotheosis of domestic ingenuity — a refrigerating coil! The chamber was filled with snow-white arctic loops. No need to have any truck with the iceman ever again. All you had to do was to put your provisions where they belonged and the refrigerating coil would do the rest!

But what about cracked ice, thought Fred suddenly — for drinks and things! Perhaps you used the ice around the coil. Fred got his penknife, scraped off a little and tasted it. *That* would n't do. He'd have to take in a piece after all. But there was n't any place for it! Well, he could keep it where the provisions were supposed to go. That was n't a bad idea — he was only going to have a few crackers and things — and the refrigerating coil would keep the ice from melting. Fred looked relieved; an ideal had come perilously near to being shattered and he had none to spare; and closing the refrigerator door he had just reached his bedroom when, quite unexpectedly and startlingly, his telephone rang. Fred jumped, flushed, and said, "Hell!" He

looked almost as if he were listening to some one breaking into his room. "That's Dora St. David!" he remarked to himself, with conviction, under his breath. "She wants to know why I stayed away from the party." He hesitated, put his hand out to take down the receiver, hesitated again, and then, quickly withdrawing it, went into the bathroom and closed the door. But as the telephone obstinately kept up its insistent summons, he burst into the bedroom again and, snatching the receiver from its hook, cried angrily, "Well — well — well — who is it?"

" — is not saddisfactory — not vot ve vant!" came a thin, distant voice.

"What's that?" Fred's inflection changed suddenly. "I did n't get that. Who is it?"

" — is nod saddisfactory."

"What's that?" repeated Fred. "I did n't get that!"

"Is this Mr. Filbeart?"

"That's me; who are you?"

"Have you your ear to the receiver?" asked the voice.

"Yes, close to it," answered Fred, in a pleasant, conciliatory tone this time.

"Vell, as you can't seem to hear vit it, dry your nose or your eye there instet — this is Strauss, of the Progressive Film Company. Your scenario is not saddisfactory!"

"What's the matter with it?"

"The death of Glarence is not saddisfactory. Id

has n't no punch, Mr. Filbeart. Ve must do something vit it!"

"Well, I can put punch in it," answered Fred, "if that's what you want!"

"Vell, how?"

"Just wait a minute and I'll give it to you right now. You want punch, do you? All right, wait just a minute. I'll give you *punch!*" All this time he was thinking rapidly, but as no inspiration came to his assistance he presently repeated:

"You want punch, eh? All right, I'll give you punch!"

There was no answer. Mr. Strauss was waiting.

"What's the main objection to Clarence's death, Mr. Strauss?" asked Fred to gain a little more time.

"Id is plowing out the gas!"

"Blowing out the gas!"

"Cerdainly. If he plows out the gas he vill be in the dark andt how vill the audience see him die?"

Fred had n't thought of that.

"Ve must cut id all out," said Mr. Strauss irritably. "The whole end must be rewritten, vich is a great disappointment."

"Well, give me a chance to think it over. You can't do these things in a minute."

"All ridght, put ve are at a standstill. How much time do you vant?"

"I'll fix it up during the day," Fred answered, "and telephone you."

"But you saidt you wouldt gif it to me now!"

"Well, I *can't* give it to you now. I'll telephone it later."

"Vat time?"

"I'll let you have it some time before five o'clock."

"Vell, if that must do, id must do, I suppose," came Mr. Strauss's voice resignedly, "put id is a great disappointment!" And he cut himself off.

Fred went to his table, hunted up a copy of the scenario, and read it over. His forehead wrinkled and, taking a pad, he began to write. He filled a page, tore it off, crumpled it up, threw it into his waste-basket and started another. This, too, was unsatisfactory. He worked restlessly, tearing up sheet after sheet, but Clarence obstinately insisted on blowing out the gas and dying in the dark, and it was with a sense of thankfulness for the interruption, when at the end of half an hour he heard his doorbell ring. He went into the sitting-room and opened the front door slightly. Sid Smallshaw was standing in the hallway dressed in his light check suit.

"Hello, Sid! Come in!"

Sid, with his rich darky laugh, thanked him and came into the sitting-room.

"Sit down, Sid. I'll show you around the place in a minute. When are you coming over for good?"

"Ah doan guess Ah can come, Mistah Filbert," answered Sid, wiping his face with his handkerchief. He was such a dark brown that Fred looked instinctively as Sid took it from his face to see if any color had adhered to it.

"Ah doan guess Ah can," repeated Sid.

"Why not?" asked Fred.

"Ah dunno!" He smiled no longer, but looked gravely at Fred with his dark, limpid eyes. "Ah guess Ah mus' stay where Ah am."

"What's the matter?" demanded Fred. "There's nothing to prevent your working for me, is there? I offered you half again as much as you're getting there. Was n't it enough?"

"Oh, yes, that wuz all right," Sid answered.

"Well, what is it, then?"

"They ain't nuthin'," said Sid. "Ah bin there a long time."

"That is n't the reason. You've always been looking for another job. Well, if you don't want to work for me, say so. It won't make any difference to *me*."

"Yassir," was all Sid's reply.

Presently he got up and moved toward the door.

"Dat was a fine party las' night dat Miss St. David give!" he remarked casually.

"Was it?" answered Fred. "Sorry I could n't get there."

Sid seemed to be waiting for something further, but as it was not forthcoming, he opened the door and stepped into the hallway.

"Well, you've decided not to come, eh?" asked Fred.

He hesitated. "Yassir. Ah doan guess Ah can," he answered after a moment.

He still lingered in the hallway as if waiting for something. Fred got up and came to the door.

"Well, good-bye, Sid."

"Good-bye, sir," answered Sid, and the last Fred saw of him he was still standing uncertainly on the landing.

"He'll come all right," reflected Fred, "as soon as he sees that I don't care whether he does or not."

But all the same he was not comfortable. There was something in Sid's manner, some touch of having been disappointed in something, of wanting to be reassured about something, of being bothered by some doubt which he did not understand and which he wished to have cleared away — which seemed to Fred to carry an unspoken reproach. Fred, however, conscious of having been guilty of a mean action, may have only imagined this.

The mean action consisted in his having deliberately stayed away from Dora St. David's party.

CHAPTER V

FRED FILBERT's education had been acquired at a college in the Middle West, whither he had been sent by his father, a small country lawyer resident in the county seat of a neighboring State. The elder Filbert — a local politician given to mysterious deals, to wire-pullings, to petty jobbery, to late nights in the company of his political cronies where, in an atmosphere strong with tobacco smoke and whiskey, filthy stories were told and dubious schemes hatched — being a widower, had sent Fred there to get rid of him, but the word "education" can only be used with extreme indulgence in speaking of the atmosphere and curriculum of Fred's *alma mater*. In this temple of learning Fred passed four years cramming a variety of undigested facts which were promptly forgotten, playing on the college baseball team, getting drunk at times, and pursuing those students of the other sex — it was a coeducational institution — who were reputed to be of easy virtue. Fred's achievements during this time — with the tremendous exception of the captaincy of the baseball team — were not numerous nor of a high order; they consisted chiefly of final examinations passed by a hair's breadth and of the seduction of the daughter of the village barber. Fred, however, repudiated this last, insisting that this feat had been accomplished by some one else at some pre-

vious time; but whether this were true or not, at the age of twenty he was extremely precocious in the pursuit of women.

Fred's graduation found him equipped very much as were the rest of the young men of his class. He knew nothing of music, art, nor literature, nothing of science, nothing of languages living or dead, with the exception of his own, and that imperfectly; nothing of government and nothing of finance. He was, on the other hand, always fully informed as to the latest murder trial in New York — they were faithfully reported in the local paper — and he knew the salary, characteristics, and record of every professional baseball player in the United States. He had a vague idea that Bismarck was a German general; had never heard of Disraeli; and if you had mentioned the two Balkan wars he would probably have thought that you were referring to events mentioned in the history of ancient Greece of which he might have read cursorily while preparing for examinations, but which he had forgotten. He could not have given you the name of the Prime Minister of England, indeed it is doubtful whether he knew that such a creature existed; but he could have beaten you handily at fifteen-ball pool at any time in the billiard parlor of the village hotel; and if he was ignorant of the latest scientific discoveries, he could mix you a passable cocktail according to village standards. The ideals and accomplishments of many of the young men in Fred's class were precisely the same as Fred's, but in one way he

differed from the others. He had ambitions. Ambitions as wide as the narrowness of his horizon permitted. He dreamed of New York, that Mecca of the Western world where the great men of the baseball field were to be seen in the flesh, where the murder trials were to be read about hot from the roaring presses, where, as he had been told, existed billiard parlors of unimaginable size and luxury, where pretty girls were inconceivably numerous, alluring, and complacent, and where existed that enchanting canyon of light and wickedness, Broadway.

Fred dreamed of these things constantly and determined to know them at the first opportunity.

Fred — on his return home after being graduated — being expected, of course, to work for his living, secured, thanks to his record at college, the position of baseball reporter for the most progressive of the county papers. It was his duty to attend games in the various near-by towns where an association of local teams in emulation of the larger associations had their regular season. Fred was letter perfect in the singularly vulgar slang which has been developed by the game of baseball, and could and often did write accounts of matches which were unintelligible to any but devotees of the game. Fred's vocabulary, indeed, consisted of little else besides slang — and this was true of most of the undergraduates at his college, it being the general conversational medium of exchange from the president down. Fred's pay as baseball reporter was not large, but he liked the job,

and, while keeping always a lookout for the approach of opportunity, he was fairly content.

In less than a year his chance presented itself.

A murder had been committed in what Fred would have called his home town, which had chanced to attract national attention; at the expense of a variety of other murders committed in various other parts of the country which were no doubt quite as deserving of notoriety. As the day drew near on which the trial was to begin, special correspondents from the leading dailies of New York arrived from that city, and, putting up at the principal hotel, immediately repaired to the hotel bar-room — where the district attorney and the chief lawyer for the defense were getting drunk together — to submit themselves to the admiring glances of the county-seat's male population. As this same bar-room was Fred's club, stamping-ground, *pied à terre*, and castle, Fred was there, and, with an enterprise he sometimes gave evidence of, he had scraped the acquaintance of the special correspondents while his fellow townsmen were still looking on at a distance. That very afternoon as Fred, sitting at a table with them, had broken his last five-dollar bill — for the correspondents to a man always developed great capacity and expensive tastes, when shielded from possible evil consequences by the wing of hospitality — he heard something which set him thinking.

The correspondents were puzzled.

The "Daily Yeller" — head and front of yeller jour-

nalism — had sent no correspondent. Of course, the trial did not begin until the next day but one, but it had been the invariable practice of the "Yeller" to have its man on the ground before any one else's. It had even been announced by the "Yeller" at intervals, by means of extra editions, that the case was to be reported by Pridmore Perkins, who was famous as the most unscrupulous, untruthful, and best-paid correspondent on the metropolitan press; but where was he? Pridmore had not arrived and no room had been engaged for him at the hotel. It was inconceivable that Pridmore and the "Yeller" could each have *forgotten* the murder — ! How was it to be explained! At that moment partial light was shed on the mystery by the arrival of a belated correspondent, one in fact just off the train. Pridmore Perkins was lost. Pridmore Perkins had been lost before, but had always been found again. This time they could n't find him. The editorial staff of the "Yeller" had been making desperate efforts and had finally, in despair, suggested to the "Yeller's" owner, Holbrook Blitz, the substitution of a well-known lady novelist, but Blitz would n't hear of it. Pridmore Perkins must report that particular case or the entire editorial staff would get the sack.

"So they're in bad," remarked the newcomer, "and it's a two to one shot that they'll all be looking for jobs in a couple of weeks!"

"Have n't they got contracts?" asked Fred.

"Oh! yes, they've got contracts all right, only when

Blitz signs a contract with a man he makes him write out his resignation and he locks it away in his safe until he wants to use it."

"But they've *got* to report the trial whether they find Perkins or not, have n't they?" asked Fred.

"I just guess!" answered the newcomer.

"I wonder if they'd take me on for it," said Fred timidly.

This suggestion drew down on Fred such a general stare of withering pity that with a sickly smile he excused himself and disappeared.

But he had had an idea!

He had determined to write to the "Yeller" suggesting his employment as special correspondent to report this particular murder trial. He knew, however, that to have the slightest chance of success the suggestion must be put in such a way as to compel the attention, stimulate the imaginations, strike as with an arresting blow the editorial staff of the "Morning Yeller." There could be no doubt that the "Yeller" could, if it so minded, send as substitutes in place of Perkins any number of people, from the well-known lady novelist down to editorial office boy, who, in their opinion, would be better able to report the trial than an unknown country baseball reporter. Fred knew that his business was to convince them to the contrary.

He looked at his watch. It was four o'clock. The late express carrying the mail to New York passed through at midnight. He had eight hours. He went home, shut

himself in his room, and began to write. He described the assembling of the forces of offense and defense gathered to the contest which was to begin on the next morning but one, but he described it as a baseball reporter familiar with the entire vocabulary of baseball slang would report a baseball match. He described the two teams, the one captained by the prosecuting attorney, the other by that for the defense; he described the judge who stood for the umpire, the jury which stood for the public, and the baseball which stood for *Certainty of Guilt* in the minds of that public.

The prisoner, a woman charged with the murder of her husband, had, through the appeal of a certain anæmic charm and through certain gaps in the chain of evidence so far as that chain was yet known, knocked this ball far afield and would engage in a desperate effort to make a home run while the opposing team, headed by its captain, the prosecuting attorney, would make equally desperate efforts to secure the ball and drive it straight and true over the home base before the prisoner could reach it. Which side would be successful? If the prosecuting attorney *could*, with the assistance of his fielders, his basemen, and his shortstop, secure the ball called the *Certainty of Guilt*, which had been knocked by the arts of the prisoner so far afield, and return it straight into the hands of the catcher before she reached her goal, her case was lost. If not, she was saved! Which would it be! ! ?

As a matter of fact, it did n't work out this way at all.

Before the evidence for the prosecution was half in, it was perfectly evident that the prisoner was guilty, but the jury, feeling that perhaps her husband had got what he deserved, that she probably would n't do it again, and that she must have been considerably punished anyway from having been in jail all those months without knowing whether she was going to be hanged finally or not, ignoring their oaths to render a verdict according to the evidence, and utterly failing to grasp their responsibilities as jurymen, decided to let her go.

This is a digression about something which happened later.

The above was Fred's theme. When he had finished it he composed a letter to the editor of the "Yeller" setting forth the advantages a long acquaintance with the actors and scenes of the approaching drama would give him, and calling his attention to his (Fred's) survey of the situation as a sample of how the trial should in his opinion be chronicled, that is, provided the "Yeller" was looking for something really up-to-date. He closed by saying that he had heard of Mr. Perkins's unfortunate disappearance, and if they should decide to employ him and should consider his account of the coming trial worthy of being placed over Mr. Perkins's signature, instead of his own, he would have no objections. Fred did not know, of course, what liberties the "Yeller" might be prepared to take with Pridmore Perkins, but he thought that this suggestion might improve his chances provided they should happen to like his stuff.

Fred got to the station just in time to drop his letter into the mail-car, went home, and went to bed. During all the next day he stayed at home waiting for a telegram from the "Yeller" which never came, but he learned from a band of correspondents who, out for a stroll, happened to pass his door that Pridmore Perkins had not appeared and no substitute had been sent by the "Yeller." Fred could n't understand it. The trial was to begin on the following morning. What could be the matter with them? He began to think the "Yeller" guilty of inexcusable lack of enterprise, and by the time he retired that night a feeling of sympathy which he had not been conscious of before had begun to go out to its proprietor Holbrook Blitz; but in the morning the "Yeller" redeemed itself.

At eight o'clock, while Fred was partaking of a light breakfast consisting of fried steak, fried potatoes, doughnuts, griddle cakes, and coffee, a boy called with a note for him. Fred opened it and read:

Mr. Pridmore Perkins would be pleased to see Mr. Fred Filbert at once in room number 215 United States Hotel.

At the bottom of the page was added, evidently as an afterthought and in less formal style:

Don't say anything to anybody. Come right up and knock.

In five minutes Fred was knocking at the door of room 215, which was presently opened by a middle-aged man wearing glasses.

"My name is Filbert," said Fred. "Are you Mr. Perkins?"

"Dr. Duff," answered the middle-aged man laconically, and he vanished into an adjoining room from which he emerged again presently. "All right," he announced, "Mr. Perkins will see you now." And Fred, passing into the adjoining room, observed a large, stout man with bags under his eyes lying in bed. As soon as he caught sight of Fred he cried out:

"Is that you, Filbert! Holy Moses, what a headache! Here, Duff, another dose of that stuff of yours. Oh, Lord! Lord! never again, never again!"

Dr. Duff mixed something in a glass and gave it to Pridmore Perkins, who raised it to his lips with a shaking hand.

"How I ever got here God only knows!" he went on; and after a moment cried passionately: "Blast Blitz anyhow! You mark my words, the day will come when I'll skin Blitz alive with a dull, rusty, jagged table-knife dipped in salt. See if I don't. Blast the whole lot of 'em, sending me out here like this! Here Duff, where's that letter?"

Duff rummaged in a dress-suit-case for a moment and produced a letter which Fred recognized as the one he had written to the "Yeller."

"Did you write this?" Perkins demanded.

"I sure did," answered Fred.

"I see you suggested that you report the murder trial over my name. Kind of smart that, was n't it?"

"I left that to the 'Yeller,'" said Fred.

"Yes, and you helped me out by making that suggestion in a way you did n't expect. Oh, Lord! Duff! another dose!"

"No, you don't!" answered Duff; "not for another hour!"

"Oh, Lord! Look here, Filbert. How much do you want to report this case and hand your stuff over to me to do what I like with. I've got to report it. Blitz says I must, but I can't. I'm too sick. Clifton the editor gave me your letter on the quiet. He would have sent somebody along to help me out, but he was afraid to; Blitz is so infernally noseey. Come, now, how much? Oh, Lord! such a headache!"

The trial was expected to last two weeks, and Fred for a moment braced himself to demand the magnificent sum of fifty dollars a week, but his courage failed.

"Well, that depends — " he finally answered.

"Look here, my baby boy," returned Perkins, "don't you suppose I know what you're thinking? You'll take twenty-five a week, but you're trying to screw up your courage to ask fifty. Don't I know? Well, now I'll tell you what I'll do. You report the thing just as you suggest in your letter — baseball idea, baseball language, and all, turn it in to me every afternoon so that I can revise it and have Duff telegraph it in in my name, and I'll give you two hundred and fifty dollars! Only the whole thing must be a dead secret, you understand."

Fred was stunned. He was stunned not only at the

prospect of earning this enormous sum, but, too, at the sudden realization of how completely Pridmore Perkins was in his power, and the thought came to him instantly that the situation must be made the utmost use of.

"That's all right," he answered at last, "as far as it goes. I'll take two hundred and fifty and report the trial as well as I know how. But after it's over I intend to light out for New York, and I want your promise that you will get me a job reporting on the 'Yeller.'"

Perkins looked at him angrily, Fred thought — but his eyes were so badly bloodshot he might have been mistaken — and after a moment replied heartily in his big rough voice, "All right! That's a go! I'll do it. You can go back with me and I'll make it my business to see to it that Clifton takes you on! Now run along and get busy! Holy Moses!"

Pridmore Perkins had been found the day before by the staff of the "Yeller," put with his medical adviser into the stateroom of a sleeping-car due at the county seat at six the following morning, given Fred's letter, and told that Blitz's ultimatum had gone forth that if he did n't live up to his agreement it would be the end of him so far as the "Yeller" was concerned. The suggestion that he should turn the entire job over to Fred had been made by the editor, who not only was struck himself by the idea and form of Fred's article, but was sure that Blitz — who was an indiscriminating monomaniac on the subject of novelty — would be, too.

The plan worked well. On further reflection Perkins

made up his mind that he must at least be present at the trial, and, after the first day, he appeared regularly, seated with a pad before him on which he pretended to write. His nerves were still so unsteady that this was impossible, but it was unnecessary, too, because Fred in a corner was doing all the work. Immediately on the adjournment of the court Perkins would go to bed without more than a glance at Fred's stuff, and Fred would telegraph it himself. The articles made a decided hit. Fred's simile, the picture of the prisoner, a jaded wretch, half-mad from apprehension, remorse, and terror, running a desperate race for life around the diamond of a baseball field, was not one to appeal to sensibilities at all delicate, but neither the staff which got the "Yeller" out each day nor the public which read it were particularly fastidious, and it made a really tremendous hit. A successful cartoon was even published showing the lady dressed in a baseball uniform racing past the third base, while the catcher standing over the home plate held safely in his hands the ball marked "Certainty of Guilt," which had been sent unerringly to him a moment before by the prosecuting attorney masquerading as the shortstop.

Pridmore Perkins was pleased to express himself in complimentary terms to Fred as he paid him the two hundred and fifty dollars the night after the verdict had been given, setting the lady prisoner free, and an appointment was made for the morning to talk over Fred's proposed migration to New York; but in the

morning Perkins was not there; he had departed on the midnight express, leaving no word.

Fred immediately cashed Pridmore Perkins's cheque, with the sincere hope that it would be honored on presentation; packed a bag; shook the dust of his home town from his feet — as he hoped — forever, and took the first train for New York.

From the foregoing pages, it may, perhaps, be assumed that Fred Filbert is to be the hero of this story, but that is not — necessarily — a fact. We shall give him his chance to be. To himself, no doubt, he is. Each man is the pivot of his own history. But in the metropolis where he will presently find himself, he will meet other heroes — and heroines — with whom conclusions must be tried, with whom he must struggle; knife-edge to knife-edge; blow for blow. If he has the wit, the luck, the *flair*, the talent, by which to hold his own, and more, he may prove himself this tale's true protagonist. If not he must give way to others more fortunate or more worthy.

CHAPTER VI

FRED reached New York twenty-four hours later than Pridmore Perkins, a bewildered country lad, it is true, but one made courageous, for the moment at least, by a flame of righteous anger, and started out on the war-path. He tried for a week to see Perkins, without success; and after that for another week to see Clifton, the editor of the "Yeller." Once during this time, while waiting in Clifton's outer office, he had seen Perkins inside as the door opened to let some one out. At the end of the second week he wrote to Clifton that he had been promised a reportorial job by Perkins for his services in reporting the —— murder trial, and that if something was n't doing pretty quickly he would n't be able to wait and would be obliged to make a "write up" of the whole thing and offer it to the "Howler," the "Yeller's" most formidable rival, or else to take the matter to Holbrook Blitz.

This ultimatum resulted in getting Fred his job, and although his method of securing it might indicate that he possessed a greater fund of determination than of good sense, his period of employment with the "Yeller" proved not unsuccessful. He worked hard, and through a stroke of luck by which he gained the good-will of the city editor, he finally managed to mollify Clifton, whose resentment against him for having threatened him might

have been greater if his own motto had not always been the Jesuitical one, and if he had not been too hard-worked a man to be able to remember it for long.

Perkins's avoidance of Fred was due to the success of the latter's reports of the murder trial and to a fear that it might lead to his own supersession on the staff of the "Yeller" if Blitz should come to hear to whom the credit was really due, and to a belief that Fred was a pushing fellow determined to get on at any cost. But Blitz never *did* hear of it, and although Fred succeeded in winning the good opinions of the city editor and in avoiding any course of action which might awaken Clifton's possible resentment, he did nothing during the four years he was employed on the "Yeller" to justify Pridmore Perkins's apprehensions. The seed of Fred's ambition was sleeping under the spell of the dubious enchantments of New York, which he had longed for in earlier days, and the realization of which had far exceeded his dreams, which goes to show that Fred's imagination was not of first-class quality. When unavoidable duties caused him to miss a baseball game — and he often avoided all but the absolutely unescapable ones in order to go to them — he was the victim of deep depression. When, on the other hand, he had passed an afternoon, in joining with a friend or two the human flood setting toward the Polo Grounds, in sitting amid fervid thousands engaged in applauding or blackguarding some gum-chewing hero of the baseball field, or later, perhaps, in taking part in the delicious game of

hustling the umpire, Fred felt that life was a desirable thing, a fascinating bauble one could not hold too safely against accident.

But if the day was to be rounded out into a perfect whole, other joys were waiting after the streaming thousands from the Polo Grounds had been absorbed again among the swarming millions of the city. Perhaps a trip to Coney, perhaps a dip in the surf, perhaps a girl waiting to be talked to, or two or three of them, according to the number of Fred's companions, and then dinner for two or four or six, as the case might be, with visits to an entertainment or two of the thousand and one inviting investigation, or some rough-and-ready love-making on the beach which, if of an encouraging nature, often resulted in engagements to meet again, and then, down into the subway to be rushed under the river and vomited out presently into the very heart of the Tenderloin with its heat, its staleness, its dust, its endless activities shut within an incredible rampart of moving electric signs showing against the night sky; signs of giant men and women, winking eyes as big as cart wheels, opening mouths larger than the billiard tables of Fred's palaces, pouring out gigantic drinks, brushing teeth with the latest toothbrush magnified a hundred times, taking some superior kind of prepared soup out of spoons bigger than bathtubs, playing colossal pianos, driving enormous motors, getting dressed and undressed, taking tremendous doses of patent medicine and turning out

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the light and getting into bed. A whole company of ogling, dancing, bowing, and smirking monsters, and Fred, gazing at them and pondering for a moment on these dizzying manifestations of business enterprise, would exclaim under his breath, overcome by an almost inexpressible admiration, "Gee! This is some town!"

And there were other pastimes; for all seasons and for all purses.

If entertainment was sought and money none too plentiful, there were always the movies; if flush, the roof-gardens. There were the billiard parlors, and, when tickets were to be had from the office of the "Yeller," the theatre. There were the small "table d'hôte" restaurants to which Fred had been speedily introduced by new-found friends at the "Yeller," where you could get a dinner for fifty cents — sometimes forty — including wine and a free-and-easy, bread-throwing company of both sexes. There were cafés, bar-rooms, cabarets, and dance-halls, offering diversion in every variety and at every price.

Fred took to all this as a duck to water and spent his money as fast as he made it — not that he had much to spend; life for Fred at this time being almost always on the cheap — rarely thinking of the future or the part that he himself might play in it.

But occasionally, under the momentary illumination of some event which happened to strike fire from his imagination, he would speculate as comprehensively as

his intellect permitted on life, its secrets, its surprises, its mysteries, its meanings.

To give an illustration.

During the second summer after Fred's arrival in the metropolis, a theatrical manager, being in need of an idea with which to excite public interest and not finding any to borrow just at the moment, actually had one of his own. He secured a cow and placed it on his roof-garden. Immediately almost the entire city rushed to see it. Fred rushed, too, among the others; and stood waiting impatiently for some of the throng — shutting in the cow's enclosure and looking at it intently — to move away so that he might look too. The rush to see the cow was really extraordinary. Fred and everybody else had been accustomed to seeing cows from childhood and had never thought anything about it one way or the other, but now it seemed, all at once, that to see a cow was a remarkable and desirable thing. Fred cogitated on this, and finally, he thought, discovered the explanation. It was not that it was a cow, because after all a cow is only a cow no matter where you find it — it was the fact that no one among all the millions of the city had ever thought of putting a cow on a roof-garden. There was nothing novel about a cow, nothing novel about a roof-garden, but the delightful novelty of bringing the two together was what caused the manager to be hailed as a really brilliant person. In reality the only merit the idea possessed was its complete banality, for most publics like banalities, want

banalities, and understand hardly anything else; and here Fred made another discovery, which was that to win success — that is, material success, and Fred had never heard of any other kind — in any enterprise in which the public is concerned, you must hit upon what the public wants. Not what it might be taught to want, what would be good for it to want, what it ought to want, but what it *does want*; and Fred made up his mind that if he ever discovered anything that the public really wanted he'd give it to 'em good and plenty, no matter *what* it was.

But the rewards reaped by the theatrical manager were really extraordinary. He made a great deal of money, and, a municipal campaign approaching, the public, coming to the conclusion, through logical processes peculiar to publics, that a man who could conceive an idea as brilliant as that of putting a cow on a roof-garden would make a first-class public official, nominated him for mayor. He narrowly escaped election.

It was an illuminating instance of the capture of that incalculable element called popular success. Amid that encircling rampart of ingenious giants winking, nodding, and beckoning for favor to a public which had long since ceased to cast toward them more than an occasional momentary glance, the theatrical manager had appeared with the simple expedient of his cow, and the scales of fortune, swinging slowly down toward failure, perhaps, had been thrust definitely back the other way.

But while from time to time pages of the book of Fred's life opened to him, bearing lessons he could not fail to read, he essayed to make no change in the manner of it until the time came, three years earlier, when he had rented the flat in the Kilkenny.

Let us suppose that during this digression Fred is sitting in his bathrobe smoking a cigarette and waiting for sufficient water to have run into his porcelain-lined bathtub to enable him to try it. He is thinking of that early December day, three years before, when he had moved into the Kilkenny. He had been there from time to time as his new furniture was being installed — a parlor set of golden oak upholstered in a sinister hue of copper-colored plush, a box couch covered with a violent cretonne, also for the parlor, on which to accommodate a friend occasionally for the night, an iron bedstead, painted white, for himself, and a bureau, also of oak, but colored this time in what the dealer who had sold the lot to him on the instalment plan had chosen to call "forest green," the drawers of which required all of Fred's prowess to open and shut — but it was not until the very day on which he was going in for good, as he was climbing the stairs with a suit-case in either hand, that he saw Dora St. David. Dora St. David was coming down. There was just room on the narrow stairway for them to pass, and, as they did so, Fred caught in the semi-obscurity the glint of fair hair, the sleepy stare of large, dark eyes, a whiff of perfume,

and the impression of a fine, robust figure dressed in a plain but stunning suit of some dark cloth.

"Geel!" remarked Fred to himself. "What a peach! A swell dresser, too! Wonder if she lives here!" When he had deposited his suit-cases on the parlor floor, he sat down in his patent rocker and continued to wonder. He would like to know a woman like that!

During his sojourn in New York the only women he had known he had scraped acquaintance with in cheap boarding-houses, or in lodgings, encountered at Coney as has been stated, picked up in dance-halls, cabaret shows, or on the streets; a dubious lot, all of them fast, and many of them so obviously so that even Fred hesitated to be seen with them outside of the places which they frequented and where they were known. But to have a friend like that — Fred used the word "friend" in a strictly platonic sense at the moment — to be able to take a lady like *that* around with you! And he forgot himself in a series of pleasant anticipatory dreams.

From time to time Fred had had glimpses of another world in New York. A world far removed from his own, the world made for the pleasure of, and inhabited by, rich people, a strange, far-away race, which at times he saw from a distance, but which hardly interested him, they moved on planes so withdrawn, so mysterious, so remote. At times, however, Fred did think about them. He thought about them, not because he had any intellectual curiosity, but because he was made to

think of them as of other things simply by force of circumstances.

During his first winter one of these incidents occurred.

Fred's place of residence at the time was a boarding-house. Outside of the dining-room in this boarding-house a kind of social hierarchy obtained determined by the size, location, and price of the room you occupied, and Fred's place in it, owing to the fact that his room was the smallest, highest, and cheapest in the house, was the most humble of all — but in the dining-room, democracy of a genuine order reigned except for the boarders having the large front and back rooms on the second floor, who invariably were given two small tables near the windows of the basement dining-room. All the rest of the boarders were seated at a long one running down the middle of the room. In spite of the insignificance of Fred's extra-dining-room status, therefore, it happened that the occupant of one of the places at table next to him was a young lady tenant of nothing less than the third-floor large front room, who, through parental generosity, had come from a Western city to engage in the study of the violin. This young lady was really a lady, and about the only one Fred met during the whole period of his reportorial experiences. Not that there were not other women about who were ladies, but Fred as a rule was n't looking for that kind.

This particular young lady — Miss Smith her name was — knowing almost no one in New York, was not

displeased at finding a fresh-colored youth sitting beside her and made friendly overtures which Fred did n't mind meeting halfway.

One evening she announced that her violin instructor had given her two seats for the opera for the following evening and invited Fred to accompany her. Fred accepted.

His preparations for this occasion consisted in changing from the suit he had had on during the day to the only other one in his possession, a pepper-and-salt business suit, brushing his thick hair, and changing his collar. Miss Smith looked slightly dismayed when she saw him, but she said nothing, and they went to the opera, which Fred thought a great bore; that is, the opera itself, not the people, who rather interested him. He noticed that in the orchestra where their seats were, the people were all very well dressed, that the men wore evening clothes, and that between the acts they were continually looking at other people in the boxes, who, reposing with the godlike assurance of dwellers on Olympus, supported these glances with total indifference. Fred discovered that the directors of the opera, with great forethought, had had inserted in the programme a number of diagrams of the boxes with the names of their owners so that every one in the audience could, by referring to them, tell exactly who these favored individuals were. The naïve ostentation of this arrangement was quite lost on Fred, who thought it a superb idea.

"Who are those people up there, that everybody's staring at?" he inquired of his companion.

"Those?" she answered, as if astonished at Fred's ignorance. "Why, those are the four hundred!"

"Four hundred what?" asked Fred.

"Why — Why — " replied his companion, just a little bit nonplussed. "The four hundred society leaders of New York."

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Fred; "are they *all* leaders?"

"I don't know," she answered. "When you read about them, the papers always say, 'one of New York's society leaders,' so I suppose so. How do you like the opera?"

"Great!" said Fred mendaciously; and he added in a lower tone, "I did n't know you had to wear a dress suit. Honest I did n't. If you ever ask me again I'll know what to do."

Toward the end of the performance Fred's attention, which wandered ever farther and farther afield, was attracted by the occupants of one of the boxes of the lowest tier. An elderly lady sparkling with jewels, a very young lady with a bold, free, mischievous glance, and a young man. Their box happened to be the one most easily seen from Fred's seat, a little to the right and a little above him.

Presently Fred noticed that the young lady was glancing at him from time to time, and that she at last whispered something to the young man who glanced, too, but while the young man glanced only once the

young lady continued to do so, to Fred's delight, and finally determining to indicate that these attentions were not escaping notice, he acknowledged them by a signal commonly used in his home town during flirtatious exchanges, namely, an unmistakable wink.

The young lady acknowledged this by a coquettish smile, half-concealed by her fan, seemed to blush, and turned partly away, but they continued to exchange glances until the performance ended, when, with a vague farewell smile which seemed to embrace the entire audience, but which Fred knew perfectly well was for him alone, she disappeared into the little room at the back of the box.

Fred, while not at all surprised at this adventure, was, nevertheless, pleased by it; and when a couple of weeks later Miss Smith again invited him to accompany her, he accepted gladly.

Fred had come to this boarding-house because a fellow reporter on the "Yeller," a married one who lived there with his wife and who had taken a liking to him, had recommended it. To this acquaintance Fred now repaired with a request for the loan of his dress clothes.

"Sure thing," replied his friend; "have you got the right kind of a shirt?" And Fred answered that he had n't, but that he would get it.

"All right; get a shirt, a collar, and a white tie, and I will lend you the rest."

Before dinner on the eventful night his fellow re-

porter dropped into his room as he was dressing, to see how he was getting on. Fred had donned his new shirt and collar and was engaged in tying about his neck a cravat of white figured satin.

"You damned fool!" cried his friend; "nobody wears ties like that." And noticing that Fred was still wearing his own trousers he kicked his posterior playfully. "Do you know what's the matter with *you*? You don't catch on to things! Here, I'll let you have one of mine." And he went to his own room to fetch it.

The young man had really put his finger on one serious defect in Fred's make-up — he *did n't* catch on to things unless they were so tremendously obvious that he could n't help doing anything else.

"There!" said his friend, coming in with a ready-made lawn tie of the kind which is fastened at the back with a buckle; "that's the only kind of tie it's proper to wear with evening dress, and if ever you're in doubt about the right thing in clothes, why, let me know!"

"All right, George," answered Fred, "much obliged. Say! let me wear your diamond ring for to-night, will you?"

George wavered. Through a lucky bet on a horse-race he had, two years before, won enough money to gratify a fancy he had had for many years, and he had purchased a diamond ring. It was not of the largest size nor of the finest quality, but it was sufficiently conspicuous to make a very good impression. George worshipped it and, although often forced to part with it

temporarily as security for various loans, always got it back again. When it was in his possession he never wore a glove on the hand it adorned, and was careful to display it with simple ostentation under every circumstance. To George it proclaimed him a person of wealth and social distinction, and Fred, thinking so too, had decided that it was exactly the thing that was needed to complete the battery of fascinations he intended to turn on the young lady of the box if she should happen — by good luck — to be at the opera that evening.

Fred, noticing George's hesitation, took him into his confidence, whereupon George, a good soul, let him have it, convinced that thus equipped Fred's success was assured.

The rising of the curtain found Fred seated next Miss Smith in a pleasant atmosphere of self-approbation, casting, momentarily, furtive glances toward the box. The diamond ring glistened on his finger, his hair — of that luxuriant description always seen on the heads of the leading gentlemen in the moving-picture plays — picturesquely brushed, and his new shirt front and collar shining with a lustre quite beyond the sanctions of good taste. Hidden in his waistcoat pocket was a little envelope containing a note, giving a fictitious name, and asking the young lady of the box to meet him at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Twenty-third Street at four o'clock the next day, which he purposed handing to an usher between the acts with instructions

to slip it into her hand as she was leaving the box after the performance.

This manœuvre, however, as it turned out, could not be executed during the first *entr'acte* because the box was still empty, but soon after the curtain had gone up for the second time Fred saw in the obscurity of the darkened house that two ladies and a gentleman had come into it. Fred's previous flirtation had, of course, been carried on between the acts, when the lights were turned up, and he calculated now that as there were three intermissions it might be better to exercise his fascinations during the second, and then, excusing himself to his companion for a moment, hunt up an usher during the third.

As soon as the curtain fell at the close of the second act he watched the young lady closely, and when, as presently happened, her eye rested on him he greeted her with a knowing smile and a slight nod. Fred knew by the expression which swept the lady's face that she had recognized him, but he was not sure that she gave evidence of any special joy at doing so. In fact, with an entire change of manner, she quickly looked the other way. During the whole *entr'acte* Fred tried everything he could think of to reattract her attention, laughing heartily and talking vivaciously to Miss Smith, running his hand through his hair or putting it momentarily to his tie so that the diamond could not fail to be discovered by any one looking that way, and turning constantly a smiling face toward her. But she remained

obdurate, and Fred, puzzled but not disheartened, renewed his efforts until, flushing suddenly, she burst into a laugh and turned to her two companions who, in response, perhaps, to some whispered instructions, singled Fred out and stared at him haughtily. At this moment the lights went down again, and Fred, firmly confident that all was going well, turned his attention to the stage; but when after a moment he glanced again toward the box, he saw, to his dismay, that it was empty.

The incident itself ended abruptly, but its consequences landed on Fred's mind with sufficient impact to mark it as one of those rare occasions which contributed to his education.

Fred, of course, had not at first believed that the incident was closed at all. He fully expected to be invited to the opera again, expected to have the note delivered successfully, and never doubted that the impression he had made was so powerful that his invitation to a rendezvous would be eagerly accepted.

But in the first place, Miss Smith, beyond giving him, in a few wonderfully chosen words, a piece of her mind, never spoke to him again.

In the second, he got into trouble with George.

George had lent Fred his dress clothes without telling his wife — who was of a dictatorial nature — anything about it, and on the following morning, waiting until she had gone down to breakfast, he slipped into Fred's room and got them back. Fred was up and

dressing, but in his haste to hang them safely in his closet George did not stop, and they did not see each other again during the day.

Fred returned to his room that evening in a low state of mind. Even he had realized that to accept an invitation to go to the opera with one young lady and then to spend the whole evening flirting with another was not quite the thing; but at the same time he resented Miss Smith's resentment. What did she expect, anyway! She was nothing but a little, dried-up old maid almost! But by offending her he had plainly put himself in a dilemma. The tickets which her instructor occasionally placed at her disposal were season tickets, therefore always the same ones. If he had to purchase a seat, which would, of course, be in some other part of the house, he might never be able to attract the box young lady's attention at all. In addition he had been staggered to learn during the day that they cost five dollars apiece. Of course, he could get in by buying an admission ticket and *then* send the note by an usher, but she was such a hummer he wanted to do it right. In addition if she should get the note without seeing him anywhere about, she might not feel sure that it had not been written by somebody else. Fred, as he would have expressed it, "was in bad," and he sat looking gloomily out of the window when he was startled by the door being opened violently and by George, a picture of righteous fury, bursting into the room.

"Say!" he shouted, "you're the biggest, stupidest,

most hopeless fool that ever drew the breath of life. Do you know what you've done?"

"No," said Fred in consternation. "What?"

George shook a fist in Fred's face and shouted louder than ever. "You left a note in my vest pocket and my wife found it there. She thinks I wrote it!"

"It is n't your handwriting!" retorted Fred.

"She says I disguised it!" George answered, still at the top of his voice.

"Well, I'll tell her you did n't!" shouted Fred in return.

"I told her all about it," roared George. "I *said* you wore my dress suit last night, but she won't believe me, nor you either. You've got to get Miss Smith as corroborative evidence."

"She's sore on me," answered the unhappy Fred humbly; "she won't speak to me."

George regarded him for a moment with a glare of concentrated contempt and then rushed out of the room in search of Miss Smith.

Miss Smith was able to identify the dress suit — through certain idiosyncrasies of taste on the part of George's tailor — as the one which Fred had worn, and regaled George's wife with so convincing an account of Fred's misbehavior that George's innocence was established, and, slightly mollified, he got from Fred the next day *his* side of the story. This was in a neighboring saloon, because Mrs. George had joined Miss Smith in ignoring Fred and expected George to, too.

Fred repeated with elaborations his account of his success the first evening, adding in detail the circumstances of the second. The young lady's determined efforts not to notice him, her final capitulation, the indignant glances of her companions, and the mysterious premature departure from the box.

"Don't you see?" said Fred; "they were as sore as crabs because she was flirting with me and they made her go home."

"What made her tell them to look at you, then?" asked George judiciously.

"Why should n't she?" returned Fred.

George groaned. "Did you keep the programme?" he asked finally.

Fred had kept it and had it in his pocket.

"Which box was it?"

"Sixth from the front on the right," answered Fred, and George examined the diagram.

"Holy Moses!" he exclaimed presently, fixing Fred with an expression of such pity that Fred, without knowing why, writhed in his seat. "You damned fool; do you know who it was?"

"Well, I saw the name. Longridge, was n't it?"

"Does n't that convey anything to your mind?"

"No!"

"You don't know who Longridge is?"

"No!"

"Almighty Jupiter!" cried George. "You'd better go back to your little bed in Oshkosh and stay there till

you wake up. The Longridges are the swellest bunch anywhere in Manhattan, Brooklyn, or the Bronx. They're worth millions. Longridge made his pile fully fifteen years ago. Nothing *nouveau riche* about *them*! Regular aristocratic old New York family, and that was their only daughter! Do you suppose she'd look at *you*!"

"She *did* look at me, did n't she?" Fred retorted angrily, turning at last.

"She saw you were a farmer the minute she spotted you. She was having fun with you. She never expected or wanted to see you again. When you turned up a second time she got out. Say, Filbert," George went on, "there's something funny about you. You do all right at the 'Yeller,' but you're thick! If you want to get on in the world, and I dare say you don't, you've got to realize that there are a few things in the world besides Coney Island and baseball and taking cheap ladies around to cheap restaurants!"

"Do you mean to say that that girl thinks she's too good for me?" demanded Fred.

"She not only thinks she's too good for you, but she *is* too good for you! What in Heaven's name is a reporter? The meanest reptile that crawls God's footstool! He's an outcast, a social pariah, and most of 'em are as bad as you are, they have n't got sense enough to know it!"

So Fred came to realize that in New York — as distinguished from his home town, where everybody lived

on terms of equality — there were social strata one above the other, some even so far above his own that he might not aspire to them. And, knowing this, he began to examine them, to notice those who seemed to live in them, and often watching in the streets, or in the theatres, people whom he allotted to those upper regions, women especially, he compared them with his own frowsy companions and wished that he might come to know some of them.

These cogitations aroused in Fred an unwonted curiosity. He began to wonder how and where they and their kind lived, with the result that the vague but glittering details he was able to gather, put him out of conceit with his boarding-house. That — and the fact that the coldness of Miss Smith and George's wife made it rather unpleasant for him — decided him to move.

One day, he noticed in an expensive quarter — wedged humbly in between grandiose neighbors — a small, old, meek-looking building with a sign hanging at the door announcing flats to let. He rang the bell, and the colored janitor showed him what he had. One of the flats he liked especially. It was up one flight and faced the street. The price unfurnished was what he paid for both room and meals at his boarding-house, but he was making enough to be able to afford it with a little economy here and there, and he decided to take it.

CHAPTER VII

FRED's tub by this time having filled itself with water, he has taken his bath and is slowly making his toilet, still thinking of the early days of his life at the **Kilkenny**.

On that December afternoon he saw Dora St. David again. As he was coming back from one of the numerous errands the process of getting settled required, she was preceding him, and he passed her just as she was going into the flat next to his. "She must live here!" thought Fred, and he sat down once more in his patent rocker to think about it.

Yes. He could take a woman like that anywhere, and be proud of being seen with her. She had a bang-up figure! Must look out of sight in one of those dresses with low necks and no sleeves to speak of. But she was n't one of your cheap kind! Fred wondered how he might meet her, but remembering a past experience he forbore to wink or smile when he passed her on the stairs. At times when he got home early of an evening, which was not often, or on Sunday afternoons — for Fred on Sundays frequently remained in bed until it was time to get up for dinner — he would hear, in her flat, sounds of voices, feminine and masculine, engaged in lively conversation, laughter, and a general stir as if people were moving about cheerfully, having a good time; and it made Fred feel lonely. On more

than one occasion Miss St. David had given a party to which Fred would like to have been invited. It was rather strange, perhaps, that he had n't been, because Miss St. David never stood on ceremony and almost always asked the tenants of the Kilkenny whether she happened to know them or not. But she had not asked Fred because — well, because she had n't. She had noticed him, as much as he had her, and through some prompting of that mysterious prescience which women often possess, she knew that she *would* know him when she cared to and that the knowing of him would lead to something more than common. She *wished* to know him to learn what that something might be, yet, womanlike, because she wished to, and because she knew that what would come, would come; there was time enough!

One day as they passed one another, she smiled and gave a little nod. Fred raised his hat, but by that smile, that slight friendly action, she dropped in his estimation, keen as he was to meet her. Fred, roughly, divided women into two classes, those you *could* speak to, and those you could n't; and it was plain that Miss St. David had given him an opening.

A day or two later he took advantage of it.

Coming in late one afternoon under the shelter of his umbrella, for it had rained or snowed at intervals during the day, he met Miss St. David at the door. She came out hurriedly and glancing at the sky exclaimed involuntarily:

“Why, it's raining.”

"Won't you take my umbrella?" said Fred quickly.

"May I? I'm only going to the corner." And accepting it with a smile she hastened down the street.

Fred ran upstairs, gathered up various articles of apparel lying about his sitting-room, threw them in on his bed, pulled the portières, changed the position of his patent rocker, brushed his hair, and, lighting a cigarette, waited for the return of his umbrella. He intended that it should lead to another word or two, standing, perhaps, on the threshold of his flat with the door open so that she could see its handsome interior. Presently he heard her come upstairs. Her door closed only to reopen almost at once. A knock sounded on his. Fred crossed the room and opened it. A colored maid stood there with his umbrella in her hand, which she held out to him, saying that Miss St. David was much obliged.

Fred was rather dashed.

But his opinion of Miss St. David went up again. Here was an obvious opportunity to further their acquaintance which she had n't taken advantage of. She was willing apparently to be polite, but was n't anxious for anything more. Fred's provincial conquests and his easy victories in the city had caused him to regard himself as something of a winner, therefore this slight incident puzzled him and shook for a time his self-esteem. He feared that Miss St. David did n't after all care to know him, but on the very next day at another encounter, she showed herself ready to make friends.

Fred was walking home — up the Avenue. When his day's work was over, he frequently — if he happened to be at the office of the "Yeller" — took the subway to Twenty-third Street, walked over to Madison Square, and then up Fifth. He was doing so to-day. He had crossed the square diagonally and at the corner where the Brunswick used to stand had turned north. The night was mild and still. A grayish canopy hung over the city from which snow was falling, steadily and softly in large flakes. Darkness had not yet come, and Fred could see against the white carpet of the snow the whole slowly rising vista of the street narrowing until it became a thread running between the high buildings, two lines of receding, grayish cliffs dotted with perforations from which lights sparkled and against which the snow-flakes, appearing endlessly as if by magic out of the darkening sky above, gleamed white for a moment and vanished into the white carpet below. In addition to the lights from the buildings on this scene of soft gray and white, others shone; the warm glow of shop windows, the clear, blinding points of the electric street lamps and the gleaming lanterns of many vehicles moving in two lines between the moving armies on the sidewalks.

The whole scene was full of movement, of light, of cheer, of some magic which filled the air at this hour and in such weather, and which roused in Fred a longing for adventure, a regret that he had not this night some special and exciting engagement to anticipate. It seemed

to him that of all those thousands walking before and behind him, going and coming on the Avenue, he only was alone.

Fred had never since he had arrived in New York spent an evening quietly at home. Being without intellectual resources of any kind, the mere idea would have seemed fantastic to him, and he remembered now, disconsolately, that he had for that evening no engagement of any kind. To be sure, there were cafés where he would be certain to find some of his friends, both male and female, but now, amid the stir and bustle of the crowds, all seemingly bent on some definite and eager quest, hurrying through the scenic enchantment of the night, his usual diversions lost their attraction.

He crossed the Avenue at Thirty-third Street.

Immediately to the west it was crowded with motors, backing, snorting, and hooting as they manoeuvred before the entrances of the Waldorf to pick up the stream of humanity constantly descending to the pavement. Fred consigned himself to the embraces of one of the rapidly whirling doors which, without ceasing to revolve, presently shot him into a corridor filled with marvellously dressed ladies getting into wraps or emerging from or disappearing into the telephone booths which lined the walls, at the behest of two young female operators, elaborately coiffured, who, with the precision of conjurers, were manipulating the plugs and levers of the switchboards, while they carried on constant conversations with each other, with faint but

raucous voices issuing from the telephone receivers, or with the waiting ladies.

"Heddo! Heddo! Cennal, one thr-r-r-ee thr-r-r-ee six. Manhattan! — Wrong number, Cennal — That's yours, Madam. No. 4!" A loud, handsome, fat lady squeezed herself with difficulty into booth No. 4, turning quite pink with the effort. "Heddo! Heddo! Cennal, six eight — what's the matter, Cennal, you cut me off! Ten cents, Madam. Heddo! Heddo. Yes, ma'am, but Mr. Bernstein could n't wait any longer!"

The stout lady, pinker than ever, was squeezing out of her box.

"There's nobody on that wire!" she exclaimed.

"They were there a minute ago. Heddo, Cennal, one thr-r-r-ee thr-r-r-ee six — there it is, Madam!"

The stout lady squeezed in again, now quite red.

"Heddo! Heddo! Cennal, seven eight four Harlem. Get off! This is a busy wire."

The stout lady appeared again, suddenly grown pale with annoyance, and repeated loudly:

"There's nobody on that wire!"

"Well, there was, Madam! If you'd wait in the booth you'd get them," answered the operator looking her between the eyes.

"Sit in that stuffy old booth while you take your time getting my number!" exclaimed the stout lady, this time changing to crimson. "Not much I won't!"

"You took so much time getting into it, Madam, your number would n't wait," the operator retorted bitingly.

The stout lady turned purple with vexation. "None of your lip, if you *please!*" she cried. And turning haughtily she started toward the interior of the hotel, ploughing a wide alley through the crowded corridor.

Fred had been waiting to get through, casting a roving eye over the assembled beauties, thinking, perhaps, that he might chance upon some discreet invitation, but he did n't, and taking advantage of the stout lady's retreat, he followed her into a long hallway running east and west crowded with people, some sitting on chairs and sofas ranged against the walls, while others took part in a seemingly endless promenade through an exotic atmosphere produced by palms, flowers, soft carpets, steam radiators, and perfumery. He caught glimpses here and there of doorways about which there always stood a detachment of head waiters with manners compounded invariably of servility and secret scorn, and beyond these doorways enormous rooms opening out spread with strata of white table-tops where many people sat drinking tea or other liquids. Somewhere beyond an orchestra boomed rhythmically.

Fred occasionally plunged into the fascinating, turgid current which was always sweeping through the passages of the Waldorf for a moment, just as he had done to-day, but he had never dined there, and now he wished to with his whole soul. The sight of these frivolous multitudes made him more lonely than ever, but it made him thirsty, too, and, making his way slowly through a number of corridors, he finally suc-

ceeded in reaching the bar, where after refreshing himself with a cocktail he braved the passages on the Astoria side, and waiting the proper moment, sprang into the interior of another whirling door which immediately spun him about and cast him into the street, directly in front of Miss St. David, who was strolling along Thirty-fourth toward the Avenue. Miss St. David bowed and smiled her sleepy smile with a look which had something of friendly invitation in it, and Fred lifted his hat and joined her.

"I hope *that* is n't where you spend your time!" said Miss St. David in her soft Southern dialect by way of opening the conversation.

"About five minutes of it a month," answered Fred. "Don't you like it there?"

"Well enough. Some people like it so well they do everything but sleep there."

"Well, I'm not one of them," Fred replied. "Less than ten minutes ago I went in on Thirty-third Street, made straight for the bar, had a cocktail, and then came out on the Thirty-fourth Street side."

"A cocktail! How lovely!"

They were standing at the corner waiting for the signal for the stopping of the Thirty-fourth Street traffic so that they might cross over on their way up-n. The stir of the city moved him again. The evening was before him to do what he pleased with, he had money in his pocket, and by some mysterious chance had found an ideal companion to share them with

if he could induce her to do so; but her serene modishness frightened him, and it was only with an effort that finally he suggested falteringly:

"Let's have another!"

"How many do you think *I've* had?" asked Miss St. David with an amused look.

"Well, I did n't mean *that*," answered Fred; and then he added impetuously, "Say, I've always wanted to know you. Are you doing anything to-night?"

"Why?" Miss St. David regarded him curiously.

"Because I'm lonesome. The whole town seems to be on a picnic except me, and perhaps you. *Are* you doing anything?"

"No, I'm not," answered Miss St. David; "nothing in particular."

"Then let's go to the Waldorf and have dinner together. I'd just love to. Will you? Everybody seems to be out for a good time. Let's join the procession!"

Miss St. David glanced up and down the Avenue.

"It does look that way, does n't it? All right; come to my flat at seven-thirty. I will give *you* a cocktail there!"

"That sounds good to *me*," answered Fred, and they walked on. "This town seems like a different place all of a sudden," he added presently.

Miss St. David looked at him again.

"Why, you *were* lonesome, were n't you? You poor thing! Have n't you any friends?"

"Lots of 'em," answered Fred, "but sometimes you get tired of them."

"You're never at home!"

"How do *you* know?"

"Because I hear you coming in at night, very late!"

"You do that sometimes yourself!"

"Whenever I get a chance!"

"Then you like being in the procession, too!"

"Perhaps!" answered Miss St. David.

At half-past seven Fred, in evening clothes — he had a suit of his own now — knocked at her door. It was opened by the colored maid who showed him into Miss St. David's parlor. Fred sat down. It was the exact duplicate of his own, but it was so much more comfortable, more livable, more delightfully warm and cheerful, that even Fred was struck by it.

From somewhere beyond he heard the sound of ice rattling in a cocktail shaker, but presently this sound stopped, some one rustled across the adjoining room, the portières opened, and Miss St. David came in.

Fred struggled to his feet as if dazed, and for once his self-assurance deserted him. Miss St. David's charms, bursting now for the first time full upon him, overwhelmed and intimidated him. She, too, was in evening dress. Fred had always before seen her in a plain street costume of some sort — never even without a hat — but now with her beautiful shining hair waved meticulously, her smooth, delicately colored face with its dark eyes, and her shapely shoulders, she seemed so splendidly superior to him that for a moment Fred

felt that perhaps he had no business there and rather wished himself safely shut away next door.

Immediately after Miss St. David's appearance the curtains parted again, and her colored maid, bearing a tray on which stood two brimming cocktail glasses and a silver shaker, followed her into the room. The maid deposited the tray on a small table and disappeared.

Miss St. David greeted him cordially, hurried to the window, glanced down into the street, and returning took the cocktail glasses from the tray.

"The taxi is n't here yet, so we can take our time," she said in her Southern accent. "See if you don't like it. It is my secret. It is a cocktail, but no one can make it who does n't know how to mix a mint-julep!"

Fred drank it. It was strangely delicious and he said so. Miss St. David, who had finished hers, lifted the shaker and filled the glasses again. "I always make double quantity," she said. "Sit down here!" indicating a deeply upholstered sofa, "and while we are waiting for the taxi we will drink our second one and smoke a cigarette. By the way, where do you get your taxis? I don't like them to be late!"

Fred was taken aback. He never got them anywhere. In fact, he hardly ever rode in one, but it was evident that she was referring to *his* taxi, and he had n't ordered it. He made a tremendous effort.

"Oh, anywhere," he answered; "mostly at the corner. Sometimes they come and sometimes they don't!"

"Well, never mind, we can get one at Sherry's. Shall we walk there?"

Fred had an inspiration.

"I'll run out and get one!" He noticed that she wore very high-heeled, pointed, patent-leather slippers with gleaming buckles. "You'll spoil your pretty shoes," he added.

"Oh, will you?" she answered. "You will find me waiting for you downstairs!"

Fred finished his cocktail, hurried out, hailed a taxi at the corner, and on returning found her waiting inside the doorway wrapped in some shimmering kind of cloak with a broad collar of fur. Without waiting for him to get out she ran across the pavement with lifted skirts and sprang in beside him. The door closed and the taxi started. A subtle, delightful perfume filled its interior. The insidious ingredients of the cocktails began to stimulate his brain, the glittering panorama of the Avenue raced past them, and the great adventure of Fred's life had begun.

CHAPTER VIII

FRED had never spent such an evening, but his usual attitude, that of the compelling glorious male being, lavishing his money negligently on a favorite of the hour, had disappeared. He was the country boy again; in fact he realized that he had never been anything else, shining humbly but proudly in the reflected refulgence of this beautiful mundane creature sitting opposite him at table.

When after removing their wraps they had approached the portals of the dining-room through throngs made up — Fred was firmly convinced — of the socially élite of the entire continent, the head waiter's attitude of perfunctory servility changed all at once to one of real respect, an involuntary tribute to Miss St. David's stunning personality, and as they followed him to their table — none of your no-account ones tucked away behind a column, or hidden in disagreeable proximity to the pantries, but squarely in the thick of things — Fred noticed a multitude of turned heads, lifted forks, suspended bottles, suddenly arrested while glances of admiration were cast in the direction of his companion.

They sat down, and as if they had been submitting themselves to some feat of legerdemain, immediately found that they were holding menu cards in their hands. A strange misgiving took hold of Fred. Was he

expected to order? He looked at it in bewilderment. It was in French. The waiter, whom nothing escaped, noticing his expression, seized the menu with a paternal gesture, flourished it in the air, and returned it to him. Fred looked at it again. It was now printed in English. He regarded the waiter with astonishment, when, suddenly struck with an idea, he turned it over. The menu appeared in English on one side, French on the other.

However, he was still perplexed. Fred's gastronomic experience was confined principally to those "ready dishes," concocted of tinned foods with the aid of a "*bain-marie*," or to the usual cuts, and he realized that he was totally ignorant as to the kind of dinner suitable for such a superlative occasion. Miss St. David had realized it, too, and when it finally occurred to Fred to suggest that *she* order it, she began at once to do so.

"And now," said Miss St. David after she had finished, "what shall we have to drink?"

"Wine!" answered Fred promptly, having thirty dollars in his pocket.

"Yes, but what kind?" replied Miss St. David, either not knowing or choosing not to remember that "wine" in the Broadway vernacular always means champagne.

"Well, *wine*!" Fred repeated, puzzled. "Champagne!"

"Oh, yes!" she answered. "I see!" And she ordered it, while Fred became vaguely conscious that somehow or other he had betrayed additional ignorance, and some impulse, at variance with a not very intelligent

rule of his, that you must n't let on that you don't know a thing, prompted him to say:

"You know I'm nothing but a farmer!"

Miss St. David looked at him brightly. "A farmer?"

"Yes. A rube, a country boy. I used to think that I knew it all; but since I met you this afternoon I've had a feeling that I don't know anything."

This avowal, wrung as it were from Fred by a sudden wave of chastening self-consciousness, pleased Dora St. David. Apart from the compliment it evidently implied, it revealed, she thought, an agreeable frankness.

"No matter how much one knows, one may always say that," she answered. "There's no limit to knowledge, and no limit to our lack of it, is there?"

"You mean that our educations are never finished?"

"Of course."

"That may be, but it's no reason for not wanting to get out of the infant class."

"Yes, if you won't forget that you've ever been in it."

This reply puzzled Fred and he admitted it.

"I mean that if the lessons taught by new experiences crowd the old ones out, we are n't getting very far, are we? And childhood teaches many things we're apt to forget. Oh, did you order cocktails?"

"The test of a good cocktail is that it makes you want another!" Fred thought this rather neat. "And yours were certainly good!"

"But this makes the fourth you've had this afternoon!"

"If I was measuring the importance of the occasion by cocktails, it would be my eighth, at least," replied Fred. He thought this even neater, and was delighted to discover a sudden unexpected lightness of tongue.

"You're not such a country boy as you would like me to think."

"Why not?"

"Because you pay compliments so nicely."

"Oh, but I am," answered Fred, flushing with pleasure, and rather annoyed with himself for showing it.

"Then if your education has been neglected, as you call it, what is it you want to learn?"

"I'll tell you what I love and what I want to know more about. I love things like this" — and he indicated the dining-room. "I love swell things. I love good food, and good things to drink. I love to see women with handsome dresses on. I love soft carpets, and — and waiters, and silver dishes, and electric lights — and then, I love music. You know, I went to the opera a couple of times, a good while ago, and the music did n't sound like anything at all, but this is the real thing; kind of soft and tuneful, and there's a regular time to it that makes you want to follow it. That's what I call life, and I love it."

Dora listened to this naïve confession of faith and answered:

"I love it too."

"You look as if you were made for it," said Fred; "but it takes lots of money, I suppose."

"And don't you make lots of money?" Dora asked.

"Not so's you'd notice it," Fred answered, made unhappy all at once by the realization that what he had just called life was so far beyond him. "I wish I did."

"What do you do?" asked Dora.

Fred told her.

"People make money sometimes by writing."

"Not the kind of writing I do," answered Fred.

"You'll find a way. How did you happen to come to New York?"

Fred told her that too. He told her, under her friendly questionings, of his early years in the Middle West, of the murder trial, his letter to the "Yeller," and his subsequent arrival in the metropolis. Fred did n't object to talking about himself, and encouraged by her interest, he enlarged upon his struggles, somewhat imaginary, and his ambitions. As he told her of the latter, it really seemed as if he had them, but he had n't. His one goal — Broadway — had been reached, and until this very night had roused in him the predilections he had just been mentioning, no new object had revealed itself.

When he had finished, Dora said: "Why can't you do now what you did then? You wanted to come to New York, and you came."

"Well, I had my chance," Fred replied.

"You'll have your chance here too, if you watch for it."

"Do you think that opportunity comes to every one?"

"Yes."

"Has it come to you?"

Dora St. David's face changed suddenly as if a shadow had crossed it.

"I was thinking about men. It does n't come to women. But this is the second time we've very nearly been serious. Come, cheer up. Is n't that a lovely waltz?"

The waiter was away somewhere, and Fred raised the champagne bottle.

"Another glass?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Another bottle?"

"Of course not. This is all we can possibly manage."

"Well, now that I've given you a slice of my life," said Fred, "tell me about yourself."

"Myself? You see me. Do I please you?"

"Do *I* please *you*? That's the main thing."

"Why?"

"Because if I do, perhaps you'll invite me to some of your parties."

"Of course I shall. Don't you know anybody in the Kilkenny?"

"Not yet. I know some of them by sight."

"Then I'll see that you meet them all. They're all so nice."

"Nice and cheap *I* should say," answered Fred; "that is, most of 'em."

"They have n't a great deal of money, perhaps, if that's what you mean, but you must n't forget, be-

cause you're at the Waldorf, that you will be going back to the Kilkenny yourself after you've finished your dinner."

"That's right," answered Fred. "Do you know what I think?"

"What?"

"That you like to enjoy yourself, and to make other people enjoy themselves too."

"Yes, I do."

"And I think that you've always had an easy time of it. Never had any hard knocks. Have you?"

"We all have, don't we? I don't like having them, though. They bruise so terribly."

"I believe you. Your skin looks kind of tender, as if it would bruise easily."

"It does."

"Well, if any one tries to bruise it, just let me know. They won't try it a second time."

Miss St. David moved a little uneasily and changed the subject. "But if you don't like the tenants at the Kilkenny, I don't suppose you'll come to my parties even if I ask you."

"Oh, yes, I will. *You'd* be there."

"Then I do please you?"

"Do you!" Fred answered. "What do *you* think? But you have n't told me about yourself."

"What do you want to know?"

"Only what you've a mind to tell me."

"Some women would tell you anything that came

into their heads, but I prefer not to. At the Kilkenny we take people as we find them."

"That's cool," thought Fred. "She pumps me about myself, and then, when I ask a question or two, she shuts up like a clam."

But this very high-handedness had its effect on him, for he asked humbly, "Have I put my foot in it?"

She gave his hand a little squeeze.

"Of course you have n't," she answered.

But Miss St. David had no intention of allowing these few preliminary personalities to interfere with the success of the evening, and Fred bade her good-night an hour or so later in a mood of considerable exaltation.

One of those experiences which periodically thrust him along the path of his history had again widened his horizon. In the company of his beautiful companion, he had penetrated into an unknown world of elegance and luxury, and even when on counting his money, he found that he had only two dollars left, he came to the conclusion that the expense was well worth while.

But in one thing he was disturbed, disappointed, and yet, on the other hand, pleased.

That thing was Miss St. David's reticence about herself. It had seemed to him that there could not be anything about such a superlative creature which could not be proclaimed with pride and listened to with admiration, even envy, but evidently there was. There was no reason why she should n't have been frank with him if there had n't been, and once more she went down

in Fred's esteem. Perhaps she was n't, after all, a real lady. This idea had its disappointments, but it had its compensations, too, because, if she was n't, she might immediately come within the category of Fred's previous acquaintances, and although immeasurably superior to them, might also prove to be — although not, of course, so brusquely so — approachable.

But she was a peach all right — and very refined. She *talked* like a lady! She had an elegant way of expressing herself, Fred thought — simple, and yet as if she was sure of herself. Fred wondered what she thought of *him*. It probably was n't necessary for him to tell her that he was a rube. She probably knew it, anyway, and yet she did n't try to put it over on him in any way. And she was friendly, too, and full of fun without being fresh.

"Wonder what she'd have done if I'd tried to get gay with her?" he asked himself.

After all, why *should* she tell him the history of her life just because he asked her? To be sure, most of his former friends were ready and anxious to the first time he met them, but *she* was n't that kind. *She* had class!

"She *must* be a lady!" muttered Fred to himself just before he went to sleep.

CHAPTER IX

THIS excursion with Miss St. David did not lead to another as quickly as Fred would have liked. She had asked him to call, casually, it seemed to him, but on doing so, after waiting a week, he found that she was out, and he did not know if he were supposed to try again.

A fortnight later, one Sunday afternoon, as he was getting dressed after spending the morning in bed with the "Yeller," the colored maid knocked at his door, and announced that Miss St. David would be pleased if he would have a cup of tea with her. Fred accepted, and in ten minutes was in her parlor once more.

"What a stunner!" he exclaimed to himself. She was wearing a gown of some soft, flexible, satiny material which slid constantly into straight folds as if weighted. It was open slightly at the throat, and her fair hair was done as carefully as before. Fred wanted terribly to make love to her, but did n't know how, and their talk was confined mostly to where Dora St. David led it — that is, to Fred himself.

Having his weekly pay in his pocket, he asked her, on this occasion, to dine with him again that night, or, failing that, then the next, the next, or even the next; in fact, *any* night. Miss St. David chose the coming Saturday which seemed to Fred a very long way off;

but the week passed and presently he was seated once more, this time in the restaurant of a later hotel farther uptown, in the usual entrancing atmosphere of music, gaiety, and light, with Miss St. David facing him in a gown more dashingly beautiful than the first.

Fred was at his wits' end. He made one or two awkward efforts at flirtation, but Miss St. David parried them so neatly and with such small effort that he was discouraged. Fred had an idea that he was under observation, and that she would let him know, when she got ready, how far she would allow their friendship to go; that is, provided she decided to continue it at all. This thought had a subduing influence, and again under Miss St. David's guidance he talked a good deal about himself.

These questionings of Dora St. David were partly instinctive and partly calculated. She was groping with feminine tentacles, partly parasitical, partly protective, for something wherewith to attach herself. Her life was too free. Too isolated. She felt the need of feeling on her shoulders the pressure of some bond or some responsibility, and instinctively sought to discover whether, in the task of ministering to Fred's needs, searching out and fortifying his potential capabilities, or helping to further his ambitions, she might find the work her nature needed.

Fred had asked himself, after their first dinner together, what might happen if he tried to get gay with her. He had repeated this question more than once, and

would like to have known the answer, but the only way to find it was by trying, and he was afraid. As far as he could see, he had no hold on her, and he feared that a single false step might ruin his chances with her. Therefore he accepted, perforce, Dora's friendship as she wished, apparently, to offer it, with the result that they were soon together almost constantly, during Fred's leisure hours, invariably dining out together, sometimes at Fred's expense, sometimes at Dora's.

One night, after they had finished and were getting up, Fred said, "Shall we go over to the Alcazar and have a dance?"

"Not to-night. I want to talk to you. Let's go back to my flat."

They hailed a taxi, and when they were seated in Dora's parlor, she began abruptly, "You said the first night we dined together that I was easily hurt. You're not hurt easily enough."

"What do you mean?" asked Fred.

"You're not ambitious and you must be. If you were, it would hurt you to think that you are exactly where you were when you came to New York four years ago. Somehow, in some way, you can make something of yourself; and we must find out how to do it. Try to think what it shall be."

Fred tried without success.

"It's no use. I've never done anything except writing."

"Then it's by writing that you must succeed. You must write a book. Have you any ideas for one?"

"You can't think of a plot for a book right off the reel like that."

"I know you can't, but have n't you ever had an idea at any time, that you thought you would like to develop, to elaborate if you had a chance?"

"Nothing except about Dictionary Dan."

"Who was Dictionary Dan?"

"Dictionary Dan was an old man who kept a cheap restaurant downtown when I first came to New York. I used to take most of my meals there. He was a rough character all right—but he had a way of getting off short sayings about anything and everything that always seemed to hit the nail on the head. I used to write them down. Well, a lot of queer characters used to go there and Dan used to take a fatherly interest in all of them. He was a good fellow in spite of his roughness, and I often heard things that worked themselves out into regular little romances. I used to make notes of those, too."

"What did you do with them?" Dora asked.

"They're in my trunk. I'll show them to you some time."

"Show them to me now."

Fred got up reluctantly, and went for them. Dora had intended to read them at once, but they were more voluminous than she expected. She finished them the next day, and when Fred called late in the afternoon, she said:

"You've got some good material here, it seems to me. What had you thought of doing with it?"

"I don't know," Fred answered; "I thought that some time, if I had a chance, I might write them up into a lot of short sketches, and try to sell them to the 'Yeller.' Where are you going for dinner?"

"Nowhere. I'm going to have a bite here. Stay if you like."

"Let's go somewhere."

"Not to-night, Fred. Dine with me. I'll make you one of my very best cocktails." And Fred acquiesced.

"But I would n't try to sell them to the 'Yeller,' Fred," she resumed a little later.

"Why not?"

"Newspapers are such ephemeral things."

"What else could I do with them?"

"Make them into a book."

"But they're all disconnected."

"Connect them. I've thought of something already." And she sketched her idea quickly. "Don't you see? With something like that as a thread you could string them all together. If the 'Yeller' took them, they would come out at intervals, tucked away in it somewhere, and that would be the end of them. In this way you would have a book, and you *might* get some one to publish it. I'm sure it would catch the public!"

This idea was so daring a one that it took Fred's breath away, temporarily.

"I could n't do it, Dora."

"You could! Shutting yourself up the way you did and working for eight hours on that letter offering to

report the murder trial for the 'Yeller,' and convincing them, too, was one of the finest things I ever heard of." It will be seen that Dora, after the manner of woman, was in danger of setting up a hero to worship. "And if you did that, you can do this. Would n't you like to?"

"Like to!" exclaimed Fred. "I'd sure like to! But to write a book! Gee whiz!"

"Well, let's try, anyway."

They, or rather Dora, began the very next day by renting a typewriter, Fred's days, of course, being monopolized by the "Yeller." She began first, very laboriously, by deciphering and writing out Fred's almost illegible notes, in order to facilitate his revision of them, which would, of course, be necessary. After this she wrote out her idea of the connecting narrative, enlarged and elaborated. Fred liked it so well that he made few changes in it. When she had finished the narrative, they collaborated on Fred's notes, changing them here and there and dovetailing them into the story. Fred supplied the vernacular, but in invention Dora proved the more fertile of the two. Dictionary Dan was as much her creation as Fred's, perhaps a little more, and of the actual labor almost all was hers.

During the many months it took to complete it, when Fred, after his day's work being ended, would stop at her flat, he would be sure to find her sitting at the typewriting machine, slightly dishevelled — a little flushed, perhaps — working as determinedly as if bread and butter depended on it.

During all this time the Kilkenny was puzzled, curious, and piqued. It was the freshest thing the way this new feller had cut out everybody with Dora St. David! Dora had introduced Fred to the tenants, as she had promised, but he had n't shown himself particularly friendly, and as soon as work was started on "Dictionary Dan," Dora stopped giving parties, and she and Fred became practically invisible. The Kilkenny resented this, and because Dora was popular and Fred was n't, put all the blame on the latter. Millicent Blomfield said, "What is *he* anyway! *He* ain't anything but a newspaper reporter! He need n't think *he's* such a much!"

At first everybody thought that Dora was simply frightfully stuck on Fred, but later it was learned, through Sid Smallshaw, who got it from Rose, that they were doing some kind of literary work together. Dora had told them this already, but until Sid confirmed her explanation, they had received it with skepticism.

Through all the interest, gossip, rumor, comment, and criticism — this last principally from Miss McGuirk — which her extraordinary behavior aroused in the Kilkenny, for previously she had been its ideal *bon camarade*, its prized specimen of super-elegant bohemianism, Dora worked steadily on. It was tedious business and she developed more pertinacity at it than did Fred. Fred, through natural indolence, from the fact that he had his day's work to do each day, and because this

intimate intercourse with Dora disturbed him, found it hard to apply himself; but Dora was determined and insistent, and at last one Sunday they finished it just in time to go out and celebrate the occasion by dining at the Waldorf.

Fred left the next morning with his manuscript and a letter of introduction which the city editor had given him to a publisher of his acquaintance. The publisher saw him at once, took his manuscript eagerly, and displayed such interest that Fred was charmed and considered his book as good as sold, but on coming home one day, after he and Dora had waited for about a month with increasing restlessness, he saw a package on his table which looked alarmingly like "Dictionary Dan." It *was* "Dictionary Dan," and inside the paper in which it was wrapped, he found a brief note declining its publication. Fred immediately conceived an implacable dislike for the city editor's friend, and hurried in to Dora's with a very long face.

Dora was frightfully disappointed too — but she concealed it — bucked Fred up — and deciding that letters of introduction were n't any help, they sent it off again.

The second publisher refused it, too, whereupon Fred was for throwing it into the fire, and said he would n't have anything more to do with it. In fact he got rather sulky about it and seemed inclined to blame Dora for having induced him to write it. Dora said nothing, but sent it off next day to Richmond Sons & Richmond,

and two months later Fred burst into her parlor one morning with the news that they had taken it.

"Dictionary Dan" proved a large and immediate success. It was, it is true, somewhat amateurish and awkward, but the platitudes and sentimentalities of the hero caught the public, as platitudes and sentimentalities sometimes do, and Fred found himself a celebrity.

"What shall I do now?" he asked Dora one day when the question of writing another was under discussion.

"Do another just like it," she answered; "change the plot, but make Dan the protagonist just as in the first one."

"The what?" asked Fred; and Dora explained.

"That's right!" Fred assented, thinking of the theatrical manager and his cow. "When you find out what the public wants, give it to 'em good and plenty!"

Fred now was comfortable, complacent, proud, and happy as he had never been before. Dora was proud, too. She knew that Fred's success was in large measure due to her, and while she womanlike was quite content that this should not be known, she derived secret pleasure from the thought of it.

During the months which had elapsed between their first dinner at the Waldorf and Fred's first success, Dora had been able to keep her friendship with Fred confined within the limits which — since a certain period in her life — she intended that no man should step beyond, but after the publication of "Dictionary Dan" this be-

came more difficult. The elation which each felt over Fred's achievement helped to overthrow the barriers which Dora was continually putting up between them. In addition, Fred, having determined to devote himself entirely to literature, had resigned from the "Yeller" and worked at home. Then, too, he had, to Fred, an incredible amount of money to spend.

These things threw them together more and more, and during the writing of the second book some hidden thought seemed from time to time to take possession of them, some secret preoccupation. They were together now almost constantly. Fred was running in continually to get advice or to ask a question, and tea in Dora's parlor had become a settled daily ceremony — necessary for the refreshment of the hard-working Fred, who, after it was over, would linger unconscionably until he was made to go back to work again against the hour when it would be time to go out to dinner together. And while at these dinners they were more silent than formerly, they did not seem to wish to avoid them.

This is not quite true, because at times Dora did avoid them; for days she would shut herself away only to return again to their old intimacy.

One summer's night, after sitting at their table later and more silent than usual, they returned to her flat. It had been daylight when they had left it, and too when Rose had taken her departure, and no lights were lighted; but as they came into her parlor they saw that it was illuminated softly by the street lamps shining

up through the open windows. They could see each other quite plainly as they stood without speaking, in a kind of inexplicable suspense, looking at each other from the opposite sides of a small table at which they stood. Suddenly Dora unconsciously putting a hand to her side as if something oppressed her said in a low voice:

“You must go now!”

Fred noticed a catch in her breath as if she spoke with difficulty.

“Dora!” he cried huskily, and moving quickly around to her, he caught her in his arms and kissed her, and as she stood, submissive, panting, all at once he began fumbling desperately at the front of her bodice.

“Fred!” she cried in terror — “No! No!” — and struggled to get free, but with a sudden brutal movement he seized the collar of it and tore it completely open, exposing the whole soft expanse of her bosom, infinitely more alluring in this disarray and in the soft gloom in which they stood than in the studied exposure of evening dress, and gripping her wrists he began to wrestle with her, and at this violence Dora, waking all at once, began to struggle desperately, fighting with such a wild energy that Fred, partly through the pressure of her physical strength, partly through dismay at her fierceness, could not prevent her from slowly forcing him into the hall.

As he crossed the threshold, she slammed the door

and locked it, and from somewhere within, through its thin panels — as he stood there for a moment breathless — he could hear that she had begun to sob, mournfully, heart-brokenly, as if some sinister blow had, all at once, shattered life for her forever.

CHAPTER X

SOME sound from some place not far distant, recurring with the regular beat of a metronome, found its way to Fred's consciousness through the absorption of sleep late that night, and woke him with a sense of impending tragedy. He sat up in bed, and then in an instant, completely awake, was out on the floor listening. The sound, stertorous, labored, came from beyond the partition dividing his sitting-room from Dora's. He stepped into his slippers, drew on his bathrobe, turned on the electric light, and, going out into the hall to the entrance of Dora's flat, turned the knob. The door was locked, but through this thinner partition the sound of dreadful, labored breathing struck an awful terror to his heart.

"Dora! Dora!" he called with muffled intensity, but there was no answer. "Dora! Dora!"

Something had happened to her and, instinctively, he knew that whatever it was his must be the responsibility.

"Dora! Dora!" — still only that fearful, recurrent sound.

Fred, shuddering with horror, rushed into his flat, shut his door, and seized the telephone book. Luckily there flashed into his memory at that moment a physician's name, which he had often noticed on its plate, farther down the street. Searching desperately he found

his number and called him up. After some delay a voice sounded sharp, but with an accent reminding him of Dora's. Fred explained rapidly what he had heard.

"I'll be there in five minutes," the doctor answered. "You say her door is locked?"

"Yes, but we can get into her sitting-room through the windows of mine by stepping across on the cornice."

"Very well; do that while I am getting ready and have the door unlocked for me. There may be no time to lose!"

Fred hung up the receiver and stood still in the middle of his sitting-room nerving himself to carry out the doctor's instructions. Something not to be gainsaid, some peremptory quality in the voice which had come over the telephone, forbade his ignoring them, but a deadly fear clutched him. He went into his pantry, poured out a stiff drink of whiskey, swallowed it, and, going to his window, looked out. The electric street lamps shone down on empty streets, but toward Sixth Avenue the heavy slamming of a door sounded presently, and he saw a figure walking hurriedly, almost running, toward the Kilkeny; and pushing up the sash of his window until it stopped against its upper frame he grasped a moulding and stepped out. The projecting top of the cornice just below gave him an ample foothold. Reaching over he seized with his other hand the edge of the opening of Dora's nearest window and, stepping across to it, stood for a moment peering in. From here that terrific recurrence, striking his ears without the inter-

position of any barrier, shocked and horrified him still more. From between the portières leading to her bedroom, a faint light shone steadily, and at first Fred thought and hoped that the parlor was empty; but as he stepped over the sill, he perceived at once that the breathing was close at hand, and it was with a racing heart that he found himself once more in the dim interior where he had left her earlier in the evening. His agitation and terror were so great that it seemed to him as if he, too, were suffocating, and yet, as he edged stealthily around the room toward the door, a horrible fascination made him search for her in the darkness.

All at once he saw her.

The reflected lights from the street shone wanly on her face and shoulders. She was lying on her sofa, livid; with open mouth; while her breast, still bare in its torn bodice, rose steadily in that frightful, unconscious effort to live; and about those paroxysms and her attitude there was something which roused in him feelings of antipathy and repulsion.

Suddenly a bell rang, loudly, sharply, close at hand, striking Fred's overwrought nerves so unexpectedly that for a moment muscular strength left him completely; his knees gave way, and he would have fallen had he not seized a table-top, but a frenzy of terror now spurring him, he sprang to the door, threw it open, and, running downstairs, opened the lower door for the doctor.

The doctor, a young man short and strongly built, with black hair growing low on a broad, short, straight

forehead, an eagle nose, straight brows above rather hard, steely-blue eyes, and a handsome rebellious mouth, stepped quickly in, cast a keen glance at Fred and said:

"Where is she?"

Fred led the way upstairs and into the parlor.

"No light!" the doctor remarked abruptly, half to himself and half to Fred. He switched on the current and was instantly at Dora's side, turning back her eyelids with a deft movement and looking closely at her eyes. He turned quickly to Fred.

"You say her name is St. David?"

"Yes," answered Fred.

"Pull down the shades and shut the door!" he commanded sharply. Fred did so. "Now, help me to loosen her clothes and get her corsets off. Did you do this?" He indicated her torn bodice.

"No! Why should *I* do it!" answered Fred.

The doctor, drawing a memorandum-book from his pocket, wrote rapidly on a sheet of it which he tore off and gave to Fred.

"This is a nurse. Telephone her to come here on the run. Can you make coffee?"

"Yes."

"Make some. Very strong. Have you a hot-water bag?"

"Yes."

"Fill it with hot water and let me have it. Which is your flat?"

"Next door."

"Do what you've got to do in there, and if I want you I'll knock, here" — and he indicated the partition separating Dora's parlor from Fred's; "but get hold of Miss Norris double quick."

Fred got Miss Norris on the telephone, and in ten minutes her taxicab was stopping at the door. Fred let her in.

That was an interminable night of terror and suspense for Fred, who spent it in making coffee, heating water, and, at intervals, as he wretchedly paced the floor of his sitting-room, listening with his ear to the wall for some sound which might lighten his apprehensions. He had not been permitted to enter Dora's flat since he had first left it, nor had Miss Norris, on her frequent visits to him for coffee or hot water, been able to definitely reassure him, but at daybreak the doctor came in suddenly, looking very pale, sat down, and asked for some whiskey. Fred brought it to him with a pitcher of water. He helped himself to two stiff drinks, and as he put down his glass after finishing the second, he said in his usual peremptory way:

"Have you a cigar?"

Fred produced a box. "How is she, doctor?" he asked in a trembling voice.

"Thank you!" The doctor took a cigar, but did not light it. "Well," he said presently, "I believe she's out of danger!"

Fred raised his clenched hands high above his head with an involuntary gesture of relief.

"Thank God!" he cried. "What was it, doctor?"

"Don't you know?"

"I thought it might have been accidental!"

To this the doctor made no answer.

"By the way, what's your name?" he asked.

Fred told him.

"And *hers* is Dora St. David?"

"Yes."

"How did you know she was ill?"

"I told you. She woke me up!"

"How did you happen to telephone *me*?"

Fred explained that, too.

"Do you know her well?"

"Pretty well," answered Fred.

"Know anything about her? Where she comes from?"

"Not a thing," said Fred, "except that she's a Southerner. She's got an accent just like yours."

"Any idea why she should have tried to take her life?"

"Good God! No! I can't understand it!"

"When did you see her last?"

"Three or four days ago." Fred had been hoping for such an opportunity and told his lie, he thought, quite smoothly.

"Does she live entirely by herself?"

"She has a colored maid who sleeps out."

"Good reliable maid?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Neat?"

"Neat as wax."

"Would n't be likely to leave cigar stumps lying about for three or four days at a time?"

Fred's expression changed suddenly to one of extreme misery, and he sat down quickly on the nearest chair. The doctor was examining the band of the cigar Fred had given him. After what seemed to Fred an almost intolerable silence he raised his head.

"Miss St. David's bodice was torn almost completely off her in a way it would not have been possible, I believe, for her to do herself. On a table in her parlor is a hat with the initials 'F, F.' on the inside of the crown, and on the same table in an ash tray there is a partly smoked cigar, still damp from the mouth of the individual who had been smoking it. Most people remove the band of a cigar before lighting it, but it is still on the one you are smoking now. It is also around the one on Miss St. David's table, and both are the same as the one on this!"

He raised the cigar which he held for Fred's inspection, and then striking a match, lit it.

"Somebody else might have left it there!" retorted Fred weakly.

"My duty, you know, is to report cases of attempted suicide to the police. If I report this one, the facts I have mentioned to you will have to be told."

Fred sprang up and turned to the doctor a face agitated with alarm.

"But, doc! Think of the scandal! I'm pretty well

known, and, besides, she is n't the kind you could turn over to the police. You can't do that, doc! Think of it! She's more — more like a lady!" Fred would have stated without hesitation that she *was* a lady had Dora's treatment of him been less friendly.

"Was that cigar yours?"

"Well, yes, it was!"

"Then, when you said you had not seen her for several days you were lying, were n't you?"

"Yes!"

"You saw her last night?"

"Yes!"

"Did you tear her bodice open?"

"Look here, doc!" cried Fred desperately. "I'll tell you all about it!"

"You can't tell me anything I can't guess," answered the doctor icily; and then, fixing Fred with his steely-blue eyes he went on: "You wronged that woman, and —"

"I did n't, doc. I swear I did n't. She fought with me. Fought like a tigress!"

"If you did n't, it was n't your fault, and I am going to give you an opportunity to make reparation." The doctor raised a finger, and, pointing it at Fred, said solemnly, "If you will marry her like an honest man I will never mention what I saw here to-night. If you refuse, I will notify the police!"

"Great God!" exclaimed Fred. "What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say!"

"Well, what right have *you* got to interfere? What business is it of *yours*?" cried Fred, furiously angry at this unwarrantable intrusion into his affairs. "Who are *you*? Who asked *you* to butt in?"

The doctor, without deigning to answer, got up and started toward the telephone.

"What are you going to do?" Fred cried sharply.

"Telephone the police!"

"I'm damned if you will!" said Fred, moving as if to head him off, but at the lightning gleam with which the doctor pierced him he fell back, saying sullenly:

"Wait a minute!"

The doctor halted and took out his watch.

"I'll give you five!" he answered contemptuously.

"Just tell me this," cried Fred savagely. "You come here a total stranger and try to force me to marry a woman neither of us knows anything about!"

Fred paused, but the doctor did not answer.

"Do you think you have any right to do that?"

The doctor gave no indication that he was aware that Fred was in the room at all.

"Damn it all! Answer, can't you!" cried Fred, suddenly losing his temper in spite of himself.

The doctor looked at his watch.

"Two minutes!" was all he said.

Fred growling an oath dashed his cigar into the fireplace and began pacing up and down. The doctor snapped his watch together and, getting up, made once more for the telephone.

"All right, damn you, I'll do it!" said Fred, all of a sudden.

"You promise?"

"Yes, I promise."

The doctor made for the door.

"Well, good-night!" he said. "I've got your promise and that's what I wanted. Of course, I know that you have no intention of keeping it if you can help it, but we'll see about that later!" And going out he shut the door after him, but almost at once he opened it and came in again.

"Miss St. David," he announced — "now don't forget this — is suffering from a sudden attack of peritonitis. She telephoned me during the night and I decided to leave her in Miss Norris's care until she was well again. Get your coffee things from Miss Norris and wash them up before you go to bed."

Fred washed his coffee things according to the doctor's orders, and went to bed filled with resentment at his preposterous and domineering behavior. As the doctor had said, Fred had no intention of keeping the promise he had made. He assumed that the law required such cases to be reported with all reasonable speed, and if he were able to delay matters until the doctor could not well report it without involving himself in awkward explanations, he might escape from the conditions which had been laid down to him and which he had accepted.

Having come to this decision, Fred turned over and

tried to go to sleep, but he could not. For what seemed like hours he turned restlessly, but finally some quieting agency began to take possession of him, he tossed no longer, the irritation left by the doctor's visit faded away. He began to think of Dora. The atmosphere of Death, which all that night had hung about him, still lingered, and deficient in imagination though he was, he lay trying to picture, to feel, those last tragic moments in her parlor before consciousness left her — before death, so far as she knew to the contrary, closed down on her! And he had driven her to it! To understand why was beyond him! The circumstances of her behavior utterly outdistanced his experience, and yet he was certain that for her act he was responsible, and seeing once more her pale face lying in the dim light, her soft bosom struggling so desperately for breath, that sensation of repulsion which he had at first experienced left him, a surge of relief, of remorse, swept through him, the doctor's demands seemed not unreasonable, and an emotion of strange, unwonted tenderness flooded his soul.

But while such wide thoughts could find no more than a temporary lodgment in the narrow mind of Fred Filbert, and while before morning they had in fact flown away, during the fortnight which elapsed before he saw Dora again, he thought of her constantly and had already begun to plan the future with her; not as the doctor had ordered, but according to his own inclinations. The physical appeal she held for him grew

stronger from their separation, and, in spite of the tragic outcome of their growing intimacy, he was determined to renew his attempts to conquer her, realizing, however, that she must be captured by some kind of special consideration.

"A strange woman," thought Fred. He wondered if all ladies were like that! So damned difficult! During all the months that he had known her he had learned nothing about her, about her past, her place, her position in the social structure. He had never seen in her apartment one person, man or woman, who might possibly be connected with any part of her earlier life, nor had he ever met any one there who was not in Fred's opinion infinitely her inferior. Who was she? Where had she come from? What was her history? A strange woman — always on the go, living for amusement, beautiful, elegant, hail fellow with any number of dubious companions, and yet careful, too. The Kilkennyites were no fools, and the fact that Dora St. David had lived there for four years without getting herself talked about was recommendation enough.

Fred frequently waylaid Rose to inquire whether all danger from Miss St. David's attack of peritonitis had passed, and while waiting for her return to health was careful to keep himself barricaded against a possible visit from the doctor. On two occasions, late at night, a peremptory tattoo had sounded on his door, which he had not answered, and he was careful before going out to scan the street carefully from his window. These

tactics had proved successful, and by the time Dora was able and willing to see him, he judged that the doctor was no longer a menace.

For a time after his first meeting with Dora — when she treated him exactly as she had done in the past, making no reference to her illness — he saw little of her; but gradually their old intimate routine returned again; he began again to drop in for tea; often they dined together; but now she was no longer alone — Rose had come to live with her and slept in a little bedroom at the rear of the flat.

Fred often wondered why she treated him so decently. If she were angry with him for what he had done, why did n't she fire him? On the other hand, if she were not, why keep him at a distance? She was as kind to him as ever, sometimes even a little more than kind; but she held him now with an arm of steel. And while she held him seemed to be waiting, listening for something which he might say to her, and which she would have been glad to hear.

Dora could not relinquish the hope of which Fred had grown to be the embodiment. As they had come to know each other more intimately, she had seen in him, young, ambitious, slowly scaling the precipice of success, the savior of her own future, who would lift her again into that place from which a grievous mischance had thrust her.

Since that reckless affair in the South — carried on through resentment and anger — when, although ac-

tually innocent, she had realized that she could expect no other judgment than the one received, she had grown to loathe all men, and yet, with the invincible credulity of woman, she had come to think that Fred was to be her deliverer. On that night she had believed that he would speak to her, and when, instead, he had shocked and terrified her by his brutality, a horrible despair had seized her, it seemed as if she must abandon all idea of rehabilitation, that it would be impossible ever to get out of the pit into which she had been thrown, and under the weight of her intolerable dejection, she had tried to die.

But with her return to health, hope, waiting without, crept once more into her soul, she began to find excuses for Fred, thought of him with indulgence, and while appraising him with clearer eyes, knew that even at this new valuation she would take him if opportunity offered. The cravings of her nature demanded a release from the dubious environment to which opinion had condemned her.

Fred, however, finding that he could make no progress with her, was getting restless. His second book had appeared some time before and he was working on the third. He had become a celebrity — of the pot-house variety, perhaps — but still a celebrity. The intellectual gentlemen who run the moving-picture industry had begun to come to him to write scenarios for them, and there was some talk of putting "Dictionary Dan" on the stage. Money was flowing in — flowing

out too — but Fred had twenty thousand dollars at his bank and was making a good deal more than he spent. He joined a club made up of the most famous of New York's literary hustlers and often went to their dinners, where witticisms of the Sunday Supplement variety were lightly tossed to and fro. His relations with Dora were becoming more and more irksome. Everybody knew that they were always together, and yet the only thing he got out of it was the pride he felt in being seen in public with her. He could take her out to dinner just as well if he did n't live in the Kilkenny, and he would welcome the sense of freedom which a change of quarters would give him. He was tied too much to her. She took too much of his life without giving anything in return. A feeling of resentment was gradually growing up in him against her, but to change the routine of their lives while he still lived at the Kilkenny seemed so difficult that he determined to get out.

Fred, therefore, began to look about for other quarters, and said nothing to Dora until he had secured them and until they were furnished and ready for him. His old furniture which, through much hard usage, had lost all of its original barbaric splendor, was to go directly to an auctioneer's.

He told her two nights before he moved out while they were dining together. He had tried to before, but his courage had failed him. He said:

“Well, I found the flat I've been looking for!”

“What flat, Fred?”

"A flat to live in, of course. I told you that I was looking for one."

Dora for a moment did n't reply. Fred had hoped that she would contradict this statement, thereby giving him an opportunity for additional asseveration, but she said nothing. Fred was irritated. He had never told her and he knew that she knew that he had not.

"Where is it, Fred?"

"Did n't I tell you that I was looking for one?" insisted Fred.

Dora looked at him steadily for the fraction of a second, and Fred decided to abandon the bullying line.

"Very likely," Dora answered. "I hope it's just what you want. Do tell me about it!"

"It's just a flat," Fred answered, — "bedroom, sitting-room, and bath!"

"I hope it's new and fresh," said Dora. "If I ever move out of the Kilkenny I shall go into the newest and freshest building I can find. I hope you've got a beautiful big bathroom. All white tiles!"

"The tiles are there all right," answered Fred, "but it is n't very big."

"You ought to give a house-warming, Fred."

"It's strictly a bachelor apartment house," said Fred. "No ladies allowed!"


"Then I'll tell you what I'll do. I will give you a farewell party!" Dora's eyes began to sparkle. "And, Fred, I've just had an idea, I'm going to take your old

flat and open a door through. I have n't room enough now. Vera Wildwood's is like that and it's awfully comfortable."

Fred went to bed that night in a bad humor. Dora was full of her party and had n't even asked his new address. On the morning of his departure, while engaged in the last of his packing, he heard her at her telephone, which was in a corner close to the dividing partition, telephoning invitations right and left for the party that night. The auctioneer had moved out all his furniture immediately after breakfast, and at any moment the expressman would be coming for his luggage. Just as he was locking his trunk, the expressman arrived. Fred went to Dora's flat and knocked. The door was opened by Rose. Miss St. David had just stepped out. Would n't Mistah Filbert wait? Mistah Filbert said he would n't, he had just stopped to say good-bye, but would see her later, so it did n't really matter.

Fred, much relieved, got out as quickly as he could. If Dora had been there, she would, inevitably, have mentioned the party, and Fred, inferentially at least, must have said that he would be there; but annoyed and resentful, he could hardly have told why, he had determined not to be.

Fred spent the day putting his new flat to rights. Hanging his clothes in a really spacious closet, laying his shirts away in his bureau, arranging his manuscript in one of his sectional bookcases and his books in another. This last task was the least difficult of all, his



library consisting of five presentation copies of "Dictionary Dan," five presentation copies of his second book, and a vest-pocket dictionary.

When he had put everything neatly away, taking an unnecessarily long time over it, it was time for dinner. He thought at first that he would go to one of his early haunts just for the fun of it, but was n't sufficiently sure that it would be funny. His club suggested itself, but he was not in the mood for it; and finally, getting into a dinner jacket, he dined in solitary state at a superb new hotel. After his dinner he descended to the café where he drank more whiskey than was good for him, finally going to bed with a headache.

It was long before he slept. He was unhappy, bored, lonely, and aggrieved. He was as lonely as on that late afternoon, long ago now, when his friendship with Dora had first begun, and it occurred to him that he had not been lonely since, until to-night. By this time the party must be in full swing. He could see Max, as he had so often seen him, swaying on the piano stool, bursting out occasionally into a clarion vocal accompaniment. He could see Dora, with her beautiful fair hair meticulously waved, her sleepy eyes and delicate mouth, moving with her ingratiating and joyful manner mysteriously superior to her guests. He half-wished that he had gone, but when he thought of the aforesaid guests, dubious strange types, undesirable even to Fred's indiscriminating eye, he was glad that he had not, and his lips tightened as another occasion for resentment

against her presented itself. What a fool to run around with such people! What a fool! What the devil was the matter with her! Wasting her time like that. Why did n't she move to some other part of town and get to know some decent people? Some of the swell kind. She was as good a looker as any of them. She seemed to have money to do what she wanted with. Well, he was done with her. He was n't going to let her or anybody else interfere with *his* career.

It will be seen that Fred was developing, crudely, perhaps, but in a measure what is commonly called worldly wisdom.

We have come to the end of our digressions just as Fred is getting ready to go out. He has finished his breakfast which has been served in his sitting-room, read the morning paper, dawdled over a cigarette, tried once more to induce Clarence not to die in the dark, and attempted to do a little writing on his new book, but he is still only trying to kill time, trying to get used to his new method of life, and finally, noticing with a brightening eye that the hour of his luncheon appointment with young Mr. Richmond is approaching, he jumps up, seizes his hat; a broad-brimmed felt of the *sombrero* variety, an affectation copied from Holbrook *Blitz*; opens his door and goes out. As he walks down the stairs — he is up only three flights — he draws from his waistcoat pocket a small oblong package done up in tinfoil, and, taking from it a flat, grayish-pink slab of

some flexible composition, folds it once, folds it again, and surreptitiously thrusts it into his mouth.

Fred Filbert, the well-known young novelist, is chewing gum.

CHAPTER XI

MR. CHARLES RICHMOND arrived at his office that morning in not the best of tempers. Outwardly he showed no deviation from his usual rather frigid alacrity, but at the back of his consciousness there lingered the taste of too many glasses of Dora's punch, too many highballs, a feeling of too little sleep, and a sense of having somewhat demeaned himself by having had a good time in undesirable company.

Mr. Richmond, on entering his office, bade his lady secretary good-morning and, disappearing within a small adjoining closet, removed his overcoat — with satin lapels — which he hung on a clothes-hanger kept there for the purpose, deposited his hat on a hook, and, closing the closet door, seated himself at his desk, where he began to remove a pair of immaculate dogskin gloves.

Every part of Mr. Charles's person and attire was as immaculate as his gloves. He was short and slender, his clean-shaven face was rather pale, and his fine, light-brown hair was brushed carefully back over an area of increasing thinness on the top of his head. His neck was encircled by an extraordinarily white collar, which in turn was encircled by a rich black satin cravat ornamented by a white pearl pin. From a side pocket in his smartly cut black morning coat peeped the corner of a white handkerchief. This handkerchief was not for use.

His trousers were of black, with fine white stripes, and fawn-colored spats were buttoned over a pair of very beautiful patent-leather boots. And Mr. Charles always looked exactly as he did this morning. His boots were always mysteriously spotless, his clothes unwrinkled, and his hair inviolate. Some young men seem to possess this faculty.

Charles, after removing his gloves and placing them on the top of his roll-top desk, began to glance through a pile of opened letters which his secretary, Miss Baisley, had made ready for him, but he was interrupted immediately by the ringing of the telephone on Miss Baisley's desk.

"Mr. Evans to see you," Miss Baisley announced presently after holding the instrument to her ear.

"He wants to find out whether we've decided to take his new book," remarked Charles. "What was the title? Oh, yes, 'Maisie's Marriage.' How long have we had the manuscript?"

"Three months, at least."

"Funny he has n't been in before!"

"He has two or three times, but you've always been out."

"What does *he* say about it?"

"He says it's by far the best thing he's done yet."

"They all say that. Has Whittlesy's report on it come in yet?"

"It came in this morning. It was quite favorable!"

Charles's brow wrinkled. "And Brown did n't like

it," he paused, thinking deeply. Presently he said, "Have *you* read it?"

Miss Baisley sighed.

"No, I have n't."

"Just run through it, will you? and see what you think of it. You could do it in an evening or two. We must n't make a mistake, you know. His last one fell flat, because it had an unhappy ending, I suppose."

"Mr. Evans said the last time he was in that Cranston's last novel published by Geer & Company, which had almost the same plot and an even unhappier ending than his, sold twenty-five thousand!"

"That's true," replied Charles. "Well, how does he account for it?"

"He says that Cranston's book had a jacket printed in six colors, while his was only in black-and-white!"

"Well, see him, will you? Tell him I'm very busy just now, but that we'll come to a decision within a week."

Miss Baisley disappeared and Charles began to scan his correspondence. Presently Miss Baisley returned.

"Mr. Swallow is waiting to see you."

She did not refer to the unfortunate Evans, who had evidently been got rid of, but Mr. Swallow, the most strenuous fictional exponent of the clean-cut young American, with his primordial passions, hot red blood and fierce, untrammelled energies, could not be dismissed so summarily. To be sure, the tremendously virile young heroes of Mr. Swallow had been going a

little stale lately, but Mr. Swallow was nothing if not on the job and could be depended on to uncover a new lode if the one he had been working had become exhausted.

Mr. Swallow was, therefore, summoned into Charles's office. He was a short, thick-set young man with smooth black hair parted with absolute precision in the middle. His forehead was very narrow and his face very broad. His face was typical of his books. He had less real reason for being a writer even than Fred. He had nothing to say and not an atom of the real writer's yearning to express himself on paper, but he had happened to become one just as he might have happened to become a commercial traveller or a real-estate agent, and was making a success of it as he understood the meaning of that word.

Mr. Swallow's mouth parted for a moment in a hard smile as he greeted Charles, and thrusting his hand into his overcoat pocket, he drew out a paper.

"Something wrong about this, is n't there?" he asked in a sharp, grating, businesslike voice.

Charles glanced at it, and saw that it was a statement rendered Mr. Swallow by Richmond Sons & Richmond of the sales of Mr. Swallow's last book during the first half-year after its appearance.

"What's the matter with it?" Charles asked.

"Only eight thousand copies in the first six months!" exclaimed Swallow. "Advance orders and all! That can't be right!"

"It's right!" said Charles.

"But how do you account for it? What's the reason?"

"Well, I'll tell you what *I* think is the reason, Swallow. I think the public's getting tired of these wonderful young Americans who go abroad, bolstering up falling monarchies, marrying foreign princesses, and that kind of thing; it's played out!"

Swallow swallowed.

"Bunk!" was all he answered.

"Look here, why don't you do something like this new English school?"

"No, thanks! Not for mine. When I'm satisfied that I can't sell a hundred thousand a year on the average, I'll quit the business. Could you do that with the kind of psychological stuff those Englishmen write? Nit! But that is n't the point. Something's got to be done or the booksellers will be calling me a dead one!"

"We're doing all we can. You've seen the advertisements!"

"You don't say anything in them about how it's selling!"

"How can we? Eight thousand in six months is nothing to brag about," answered Charles.

"Tell you what you do." Swallow whispered. "Call five hundred copies an edition. In that way you could advertise that sixteen editions have been sold."

"Can't do it, Swallow. Against the rules of the house," answered Charles.

Swallow was thinking hard.

"Look here," he said at length; "what's the largest single day's sale? Look it up, will you?"

Miss Baisley was dispatched for this information.

"Of course, the largest day's sale will be one during the time the advance orders were coming in," explained Charles, and on Miss Baisley's returning with a slip of paper he added: "You see, as it happened, advance orders were received on one day for two thousand one hundred copies, more than a quarter of the entire sale!"

Swallow drew a pencil from his pocket and taking a pad from Charles's desk, began to write rapidly. After a moment he tore the sheet on which he had been writing from the pad and handed it to Charles, saying triumphantly:

"Put this at the top of your ad!"

Charles read:

IMMENSE SUCCESS
OF MR. SWALLOW'S NEW NOVEL!

The sales of Rochester Swallow's new novel, "CADWALADER TAKES A HAND," have reached as high as the enormous number of over two thousand copies a day!

Charles's eyes glinted.

"That's not bad!"

"Will you put it in?"

"I will!" answered Charles.

"Good!" Swallow got up quickly. "Well, so long. If that does n't work, we'll try something else!"

"All right," answered Charles, "but try another tack in your next!"

"Oh, I'm on that already," said Swallow; "trust *me!*"

"I believe you. Good-bye."

Miss Baisley had her ear to the telephone.

"Mr. Filbert," she announced as the door shut on Swallow.

"Dammit!" said Charles. "I was to take him to lunch. I'd forgotten all about it and promised to go with my wife!"

Charles's idea of an ideal publishing business was one where you would never have to publish anything; but as the house of Richmond Sons & Richmond was out to publish books and not to not publish them, Charles realized that this dream was an impossible one. At the same time his real and only pleasure in the publishing business was derived from the books he did not publish — not from those he did — except on rare occasions.

The business of Richmond Sons & Richmond consisted mainly in the publication of works of fiction. When one of these works was sent in for inspection — and to Charles's disgust they were always being sent in — it was the custom to dispatch it to one or another of a regiment of intelligent but unfortunate beings called "readers." These readers were people compelled, through the exigencies of existence, to read any and all

books which were sent to them in exchange for a certain stipend. If the reader to whom the book was first sent damned it uncompromisingly, Charles received the verdict with pleasure and promptly sent it back to its creator. These were the happy incidents of Charles's business career; but, while the adverse judgment of the first reader almost always resulted in the return of a book without further consideration, his recommendation of it never meant that it was to be immediately accepted, and it was when his report was a favorable one that Charles's troubles began. The first step after the first reader had recommended the publication of a manuscript was to submit it to a second. It was hardly likely that the second reader's opinion would coincide entirely with the first, and it hardly ever did. He might disagree with him completely, or agree with reservations and with the pointing out of faults or virtues which had apparently escaped the notice of the first reader. The reports of the first and second reader were almost invariably far enough apart to demand the opinion of a third. Charles in the meantime was trying to make up *his* mind about it, but having no real liking for books, he found it very difficult. The opinion of the third reader, who always raised points of commendation or censure which had escaped the others, further complicated matters, and usually the book was submitted to a fourth. This might have gone on indefinitely had it not usually occurred to Charles at about this point that the item of expert opinion on the particular book under

consideration was beginning to assume undue proportions, whereupon further professional advice was dispensed with; but as the house of Richmond Sons & Richmond were as far as ever from reaching a decision, more opinions were obtained by handing it around to various employees.

This idea had originated with Charles, who wanted to get, he said, after the expert advice of the readers, the opinion of laymen — the impression which the work under consideration might make on the average mind — which, after all, was what the great reading public was probably largely made up of. Therefore, almost any afternoon, Miss Baisley, the advertising manager, the salesmen, the bookkeepers, or the typewriting or telephone young ladies, might be seen listlessly lugging bundles of manuscript home with them when they left for the night. The listlessness with which this work was undertaken was explained by the fact that there was no remuneration for it, the firm pointing out that whatever increased the personal interest of the employees in the firm's ventures must make for the greater efficiency of its organization, and, consequently, for their own welfare. By the time that these additional reports were made, the diversity of opinion had become so great that the firm of Richmond Sons & Richmond — including Charles — was utterly unable to make up its mind, vacillating weakly between the idea that the work under consideration was poor stuff, bound to be a flat failure, and the thought that it might, after all,

possess qualities which would make it the best seller of the season. The expert opinion at first obtained was forgotten or ignored entirely, and need not have been employed at all, and so far as any real knowledge or conviction of the merits of the book were concerned, in accepting or refusing it, it might as well have been decided by drawing a marked paper out of a hat. As a matter of fact, its fate was usually determined, after the unfortunate author could really be kept in suspense no longer, by the last person who happened to have read it. Charles, at his wits' end, would say to Miss Baisley:

"I say, we've *got* to decide about Brown's — or Smith's or Robinson's — book. Who's reading it *now*?"

"Miss Peters was the last," Miss Baisley might answer, Miss Peters being the young lady who ran the telephone switchboard. "She just brought it back this morning."

"Well, what did *she* think of it?"

"She thought it was lovely."

"She did, eh?" Charles would remark. "Well, I thought it was pretty good myself. I think we'll take it."

Fred's third book had just been going through this routine, and having come at last to the assistant shipping clerk, had been pronounced upon adversely.

"Tell him to come in," said Charles, "and I'll see if I can't get hold of my wife before she leaves the house and head her off!" And he disappeared through a side door opening into an office in which stood a telephone

booth as Miss Baisley instructed the operator to send Fred in.

Fred came in at once, said "Good-morning" to Miss Baisley, and sat down by Charles's desk in the chair recently vacated by Rochester Swallow. The articulation of these two words reminded Fred that his mouth still contained the chewing-gum he had inserted in it on leaving his flat, and, with a hurried glance at Miss Baisley to assure himself that she was occupied with her typewriter, he seized it quickly from between his lips, and, rolling it into a small sphere, pressed it surreptitiously against the underside of the wooden framework of his chair.

Almost immediately Charles returned. He had not been able to reach his wife, as she had already left the house. This was annoying. He had determined to tell Fred that Richmond Sons & Richmond had decided to decline his new book in its present shape, but he wished to induce him — before submitting it to another publisher — to rewrite it and give them another chance at it. Fred had really been so successful, with his first novel particularly, that they did not wish to lose him. To accomplish this plan Charles had calculated on the assistance of an excellent luncheon.

It occurred to him that he might telephone to Delmonico's and leave word for his wife that he would be unable to meet her, but that would mean trouble later, and he decided not to. The best thing to do would be to transport Fred to Delmonico's in a taxi, leave him in

it while he explained things to his wife, and then take him somewhere else for luncheon. Having decided on this course, he came in briskly, saluting Fred with —

“Hello, Filbert — Oh, Miss Baisley, telephone for a taxi, will you? Well, I went to a party last night given in honor of a rising young novelist who never turned up! How about it, eh? What the devil — !”

Charles was holding one of his beautiful boots in the air twisting about so as to look at the bottom of it. A cake of something flattened to about the size of a twenty-five-cent piece was adhering to its heel. He had turned quite pale and looked for a moment as if he were going to be ill.

“Chewing-gum!” he cried in a hollow voice, with mingled accents of repulsion and anger, and holding his foot toward Miss Baisley he asked ominously:

“Is that *yours*?”

“Certainly *not*, Mr. Richmond,” answered Miss Baisley coldly.

“Well, whose is it? I won’t have people who chew gum in this office.”

Fred’s silence was so intense that it was almost noisy.

“I don’t know,” answered Miss Baisley. “The scrub-woman, perhaps. A messenger boy was in here early.”

“Could it have been Swallow?”

Fred had an idea. Rochester Swallow was no friend of his.

“I think I must have knocked it off the bottom of my

chair. I remember running my hand around it and feeling something."

He got up and, turning the chair over, a round spot was revealed, slightly damp, with one or two small particles of gum adhering to its outer edge.

The telephone rang. "Taxi, Mr. Richmond!" Miss Baisley announced. Charles hopped across the room and removed the gum by scraping his heel on the steam radiator pipe. "It must have been Swallow," he muttered. "Come on, Filbert." And going into his closet he reappeared with his hat and overcoat and, visibly annoyed, led the way to the taxi.

They rode uptown almost in silence, Charles's affability, which he could usually summon into service, refusing to respond to his call. Two things had upset him, the episode of the chewing-gum and the fact that he was on his way to see his wife, whom he loathed with his whole soul.

He loathed his wife's looks, her hair, her large teeth, white and regular though they were; her rather prominent eyes, and a way she had of using them; he loathed her voice, the way she talked, the way she walked, her figure, her character, her damned insincere ideas about everybody and everything, and he loathed her because she was an incorrigible, an insatiable flirt. He loathed everything about her except the position she had given him in the social constellation by marrying him. Sometimes he tried to loathe that, too, but he could n't. But although he loathed her he obeyed her. He was like a

sleek little dapper mouse in the grasp of a strange kind of lazy exotic cat who would n't bother to use her very sharp claws if he always did exactly what she wanted him to.

The taxi stopped before Delmonico's, and as Charles got out he perceived that his wife's small town car was drawing in to the curb directly behind. He could see her through the large sheet of plate glass which filled the front of it. Charles waited until it stopped and put his head in at the window. His wife, leaning back in a corner, wearing a hat with a wide brim which shaded her eyes and deepened the artificial shadows under them, looked at him almost dreamily, her red lips parted in a smile in her white face, and she held out her left hand clothed in a white glove.

"What a gallant little Charles! Waiting to open my door for me!" She did not move, looking at him with her enigmatic smile from under the shadow of her hat. Charles, with his head still in the window, explained the situation as rapidly as possible, and as he spoke his taxi containing Fred turned and came to a stop at the opposite curb, waiting. As it stopped, Edith Richmond, glancing toward it, saw its occupant. She turned away, but presently looked again. She was trying to recall something. As Charles still spoke, she glanced into the taxi once more. Fred, unconscious that he was under observation, removed his hat and ran his fingers through his hair; on one of them something sparkled, and that sparkle flashed a little message to her.

"What is he like, Charles?" she asked.

"Who, Filbert?" Charles grimaced.

"I should like to meet him. Let me come, too. Are you supposed to talk to authors about their books? Because I have n't read them."

"That does n't matter, but I've explained that I want to talk business."

"You need n't talk business until you begin to smoke. It's much better not to, and by that time I shall be gone. Run and tell him like a good little Charles."

Charles's expression was not happy.

"Lunch with him *here*?" he asked apprehensively.

"No, not here, Charles! Some place on Broadway, perhaps!"

Charles hesitated, but finally answering reluctantly, "All right," crossed the street to the taxi. He hated being with his wife in the company of only a few people. Being alone with her was n't so bad, because if she chose to tease him there was no one to hear her, nor being in a crowd where he might lose himself; but with only a few people he usually felt defenseless, with a constant fear that she might begin subtly to ridicule him in such a way that he was not always quite sure whether the others "caught on" or not.

Fred presently emerged from the taxi and came over, in Charles's company, to Mrs. Richmond's car. When Charles introduced him, she smiled without speaking at first and extended her left hand. Both of these actions, her silent, welcoming smile which seemed to say, "We

have never met before, but it is perfectly certain that we are to become dear friends," and her way of giving her left hand drove Charles at times almost frantic. They were simply two of her repertoire of affectations, but they always especially enraged him. She never smiled that way at women and never gave them her left hand, but she almost always did it to all men. At times, when Charles witnessed the repetition of these little manoeuvres, he felt as if he must break out into roars of profanity, stamp, tear his hair, and, finally, beat her savagely, but of course he never did, not even when in reply to a small, inward voice which whispered to him, "Live and let live, my dear fellow," he would reply, hissing between his teeth, "Go to the devil — get out! She's such a liar, such a vampire she does n't *deserve* to live!"

Edith Richmond was n't nearly so bad really, but married people frequently hold opinions of this kind about each other.

Presently Edith, after smiling for a second or two and extending her left hand, said, "Howd' you do," and to Charles there was something simply vile about the way she said it.

There was no front seat in Edith's car, so all three sat in the back one, Edith and Fred at each side in the corners, and Charles squeezed between them on the edge of the seat, and as they crossed toward the Broadway restaurant which had been decided on, Charles reflected that he could n't remember ever having ridden in his wife's car in any other way — sitting on the edge of the

seat as he was doing now, squeezed in between her and some other occupant, almost always a man.

The motor stopped. Charles got out first, then Edith, and last of all Fred. Fred now had his first opportunity to really see what Mrs. Richmond was like, and his first impression was that she was far from attractive. She was tall and angular, and, Fred thought, much too thin. He did n't like the whiteness of her face, the redness of her lips, or the shadows under her eyes, and yet she was dressed in some peculiar kind of elegant way which, together with her incurable self-consciousness — which few people recognized as self-consciousness and which nobody had ever dared to tell her she had excepting her mother — gave her a kind of distinction which made some people call her handsome.

She and Charles moved into the restaurant with an air which proclaimed to any one who cared to look, that they were, undoubtedly, personages. The head waiter came up obsequiously as if he perfectly agreed with them and, without a moment's hesitation, called them by name. Fred, knowing that Charles was the only really fashionable publisher in the business, and having heard that Mrs. Richmond was actually one of the four hundred, was proud to be in such company. He thought for an instant of the pride he had felt in dining out with Dora, and as he thought of it, that former pride, in the presence of the present one, shrunk away as if too mean a thing to dare to show itself.

Cocktails were ordered immediately, and Charles,

after having his and feeling better for it, began an account of the party at Dora's. Edith seized upon it avidly, its novelty attracted her, and it provided a topic which would keep them going through luncheon. She made Charles go into details, and told him that she was furious at his not taking her, notwithstanding the fact that he explained that he had n't known anything about it until a few minutes before he had gone there. Fred was bombarded with questions as to why he had stayed away from his own party, and evaded them as well as he was able — rather inclined to feel ashamed of the whole business.

The luncheon had turned out to be a rather jolly one.

"By the way, Edith, guess who was there — Vera!" said Charles, just happening to think of it.

"Vera! Found at last! And at this fascinating party! Mr. Filbert, the next time your handsome friend gives one you must see that I get an invitation. She *is* handsome, is n't she?"

"*Rather!*" said Charles. "Oh, and Uncle John was there, too. He and Vera live there."

"With Mr. Filbert's handsome friend?"

"No, in the same house. You know it. That ramshackle place of grandfather's."

"Was grandfather there, too? I shall really have to speak to Mr. Filbert's handsome friend." Edith began putting on her gloves. "I'm afraid she's rather dangerous. If you need help, Mr. Filbert, come to me. I'll send

you a card" — at which Charles made a face — mentally.

Edith Richmond rode uptown, smiling to herself with a smile so identical with the one with which she had greeted Fred, that if Charles could have seen her he would have expected her momentarily to extend her left hand. It really was most amusing! How long ago was it since that night when that common-looking young man had tried to flirt with her at the opera? Three years, because it was just before she and Charles were married; in fact, Charles had been there that night, too, with her mother. At that time she remembered she took Fred to be a very impudent and ignorant clerk of some kind. How extraordinary that he should have turned out to be a celebrity and that she should have met him in this curious way. He still looked very much like a clerk, but there was a kind of veiled boldness about him which she rather liked. Should she send him a card? It might not be a bad idea — having a celebrity to dinner occasionally — she must read one of his books.

Edith was one of those women whose emotions must be continually titillated by affairs with men. These affairs succeeded one another with astonishing regularity. When one began to show signs of waning, the astute observer would notice that a new candidate — kept discreetly in the background — was already in training, being got ready to step into the shoes of the retiring favorite. There was a regular succession of them. The new candidate would appear, not harshly, not produced

suddenly like a conjuror's rabbit, but insinuatingly, by degrees, until reaching the full measure of his refulgence he would begin to recede, grow misty, while some new shape grew corporeal behind him. And they were all carefully chosen. Edith was an adept; she was fastidious, but she liked new flavors; that was why Fred appealed to her. She whistled through her speaking tube and told her chauffeur to stop at the nearest bookshop.

All at once she thought of Vera. The little wretch! Was she trying to get around Grandfather Penfield? Charles would have to look out!

CHAPTER XII

THE pleasure Fred had derived from lunching with Mr. and Mrs. Charles Richmond was considerably mitigated — after Edith's departure — by Charles's announcement of the decision Richmond Sons & Richmond had reached regarding his new book. It was unexpected and dispiriting. For two years Fred had been sailing on the top wave of success, never dreaming that any shoals or tempests might retard his gladsome progress. He was so surprised that he could n't decide what to say in answer to Charles's suggestion to rewrite it, replying that he would think it over, and upon Charles announcing that he must get back to his office, he said that he thought he would stay where he was for a while and finish his cigar. Charles therefore got up, said good-bye and went away, while Fred ordered another pot of coffee.

He was seriously dismayed by the two blows which had fallen that day. The one he had just received and Strauss's dissatisfaction with his scenario, and the real reason for his dismay was a sudden fear that he lacked the ingenuity to change them. He searched his brain for ideas, but at the moment it seemed as empty as his rooms had looked at the Kilkenny the morning before, after the furniture movers had been there.

The Kilkenny suggested Dora. He supposed she had been calling up to ask him what had become of him, and

just to find out he went to a telephone and got the operator at his apartment house. There had been no calls for him — the operator said — of any kind.

Fred went back to his table. After all, it would have been surprising if she *had* called him up. She was probably angry with him, and come to think of it, he did owe her an explanation. It was n't as if he never intended to see her again. That had n't been his idea at all. He had moved away simply to be able to control the situation a little better and to be able to see her or not as he chose. If he *had* wanted to get rid of her, then his non-appearance at her party, without a word of explanation, would have been perhaps the course to take; but as that was n't his intention, as in fact he *did* n't want to break with her completely, perhaps he had better, after all, not delay too long in trying to appease her. Fred's understanding of his original motives was becoming modified by the pressure of expediency. He had suddenly felt a tremendous desire to talk things over with Dora.

He looked at his watch. Luncheon, his talk with Charles, and his subsequent cogitations had consumed three hours; it was after four, and with a sudden resolution he paid for his coffee and started for Dora's flat.

As he walked down Broadway he felt that he was making, in a degree, a capitulation; but he was resolved to prevent Dora's taking this view of it by an artful but restrained description of his luncheon with the Richmonds and by his conveying the impression that Mrs.

Richmond had impressed him. Mrs. Richmond, by the way, really had.

Turning into the side street on which the Kilkenny stood, he had just crossed Sixth Avenue when he heard the sound as of a metallic object striking sharply some adjacent window pane. He looked up and saw, to his consternation, a Napoleonic face regarding him — an eagle nose, steely-blue eyes, and a mouth of mingled cynicism and rebellion; under it, in the window frame, like the label on a portrait, the sign, "Dr. Marsham," caught his eye.

"Damn!" exclaimed Fred to himself.

The doctor, with a compelling gesture, beckoned him to come in, and Fred, furious, yet for some reason unable to disobey it, ascended the two steps to the vestibule just as the doctor opened a small door in it which, independent of the main entrance, gave access to his office. The apartment house nearer Sixth Avenue than the Kilkenny was a typical West-Side flat of the cheap modern variety. The doctor led the way, without speaking, through his waiting-room into his office. The waiting-room was furnished with a small sofa of particularly hideous design, made of some cheap wood polished to imitate mahogany and upholstered in green plush, and three small chairs to match. These pieces, with a small American rug, were all that the room contained — no pictures, no books. The doctor's office, a little larger than the waiting-room, but badly lighted by one narrow window, was furnished with two armchairs made of

shiny yellow oak with extremely hard seats, the doctor's desk, and a box couch, evidently his bed. Through a doorway leading into a lavatory with a wainscot of cracked white tiles, Fred could see a set of glass shelves on which were arranged a number of surgical instruments, bottles, and appliances of an unfamiliar nature. On the shelf over the fireplace — which was merely a sheet of asbestos with an arrangement of gas-jets below — a clock, made of black marble with engraved gilded lines, ticked faintly, and two photographs hung on the walls. One of them showed a house — surrounded by trees — with white columns supporting a classic pediment. A two-seated carriage, with a pair of horses stood before the door, in which sat a darky coachman holding the reins, while a number of people of both sexes and various ages, in antiquated costumes, were grouped on the steps of the porch. The other was a cabinet-size portrait of a young man in spectacles wearing a full dark beard. With the exception of the clock and the photographs this room was as devoid of ornaments as the other. The aspect of both was ugly, bare, cheerless, and comfortless to a degree, but there was, one felt, about the doctor, a constant preoccupation, the preoccupation of an intense and faithful energy which made him indifferent alike to beauty, comfort, cheer, amusement, or the pleasant relaxations of life. His beloved profession included them all. She was his world, his mistress, his fireside hearth, his anodyne.

He drew out the chair standing in front of his desk,

motioned Fred to the other, and fixing him with his disconcerting, indomitable eyes, he said without preliminary:

"Well, have you kept your promise?"

Fred had felt immediately, as he had felt that other night, the spell of the doctor's dominating personality. He had decided at first to defy him and to challenge him to do his worst, but now he found that he lacked courage for such a course; therefore he answered instead:

"Not yet!"

"Why not?"

"Do you think all I've got to do is to *ask* her?"

"*Have* you asked her?"

"Yes," lied Fred.

"What did she say?"

"She would n't give me a decided answer one way or the other. For a month she would n't speak to me at all. I'm doing what I can, but," he added pleadingly, beginning to fear — under the influence of the doctor's mere presence — that he might have to keep his promise, after all, "I don't think it's a square deal, doctor, to try to force me to marry a woman I don't know anything about!"

"I've found out about her!"

"Is that so!" answered Fred, with interest. "I'd like to know about her, doctor. She's been a mystery all right!"

"If I tell you, will you keep it to yourself?"

"I surely will, doctor."

"Sure?"

"Certain sure!"

"All right," responded the doctor. "Well, in the first place, St. David is n't her name. It was her mother's, before *she* was married, but as it's the one she has chosen it will do as well as any other. It was St. David, though, which gave me something to start on, because it's an old Virginia name, and I knew that if it was hers, or if she was a connection of any of them, I could find out about her. I'm sorry I know her history — it's her secret and she's trying to keep it — because it makes it necessary to tell *you*. It would n't be a square deal not to. But I intend to hold you to your promise!"

He paused again, shot a threatening gleam at Fred, and went on.

"Dora St. David comes of a good Virginia family, none better. Her father and mother were dead and she lived with an aunt, one of the leading ladies of the town. She had four thousand a year in her own right. Down in Virginia that's a lot of money. She was the belle of the place. One day she got married. In a year she had a baby — in another year, another. After that she did n't have any more." The doctor stopped. "By the way, want a cigar?"

Fred accepted.

The doctor carefully unlocked a drawer of his desk. Fred saw that it contained a box of cigars. Otherwise it was empty. The doctor opened the box and offered it to

Fred. Fred noticed — burnt on the cover of the box — the legend:

THE VIRGINIA VIRGIN

A Peerless Five Cent Cigar

He took one, the doctor, too, helped himself, and then with equal care locked the box away.

"You know," continued the doctor, "or perhaps you don't, that a kind of looseness of habit and of life in general has been growing up all over the country. Life now, for instance, in the place in Virginia where I come from is very different from what it was when my mother was a young woman or even when I was in my early teens. They've got a country club down there now, and motors, and they've acquired the cocktail habit; there is a set where the women have learned to play auction for money and the men to make love to one another's wives. There is a set like that in every town in the country now, and Dora St. David got into the one in hers. She and her husband were n't getting along together at all. He was very strict, paid too much attention to his business and not enough to her, and, besides, as Dora St. David was very handsome, he was jealous of her. He was the kind of man who had about as much right to get married as I would have. The damned fool did n't know enough to give her her head, but kept using the curb on her instead, which made her, of course, rebellious and unhappy; and just at this time the inevitable chap appeared, who always *does* appear, and the crash came. Her husband

worked the old game of pretending to go away for a few days, but coming back the same night, he caught them! That is to say, he caught them under circumstances sufficiently incriminating to give him a divorce on the grounds of adultery; and, taking advantage of it, he did what the average man might be depended on to do under the circumstances. He got his divorce and kicked her out!”

The doctor took a long pull at his cigar.

“My dear fellow, the average man is a serious drag on the wheels of civilization. He is always with us. He is sometimes very capable. He does things. He does them the way they have always been done before, that is, without imagination, but he does them. He has learnt the old lessons well, but he never learns new ones. He runs our affairs for us, and he keeps on running them as they always *have* been, until we discover that he’s behind the times and kick him out, when a new type of average man — only very much the same fundamentally — takes his place; and stays there until he’s kicked out in turn. There’s something particularly deadly about the average man to me; his is such a hopeless combination of prejudice, unreason, and ignorance. Well, this one, with the aid of a good, old-time divorce suit, nasty details, savage vindictiveness, and all, kicked *her* out and took her children away from her.

“After the trial she could n’t stay at home, of course, because she was practically ostracized. Even her aunt — a good, self-righteous, narrow-minded soul — would n’t

have anything to do with her, and so she left there, and, wanting to lose herself, came here. She writes to one or two women friends occasionally, but does n't give them much information about herself. She writes to them for news of her children. When they were taken away from her, one was a little over a year, the other a little over two; and she has never seen them since. I believe that at first she used to write to her former husband asking if she might not see them, but he never answered her letters, and at last she gave it up."

The doctor relighted his cigar, which had gone out.

"Well, that's her story. Does it prejudice you against her?"

"But, look here, you say that the evidence against her was incriminating enough to get her husband a divorce. Was there any actual proof that she had done wrong?"

"There was not. As I have already said, the evidence was sufficient to justify the inference that she had; but no more."

"Then as a matter of actual fact she may have been perfectly innocent?"

"Yes. Are you prejudiced against her now? Would you be afraid to marry a woman with a past like that?"

"Well, she's got no one but herself to blame. Does her husband still think that she's guilty?"

"He probably is n't saying what he thinks."

Fred had stood up, and, for want of something better to look at, was scrutinizing the cabinet photograph of the young man with the dark beard.

"Know who that is?" asked the doctor.

"No," answered Fred.

"That's me! Doctors often wear beards at first to make them look older. Supposed to give people more confidence in 'em."

"But the spectacles?"

"Plain glass. Well, that's all. Try to look at it with an open mind. Don't forget your promise. And don't look at it from the point of view of the average man. By the way, ever have any trouble with your kidneys?"

"Not that I know of," answered Fred, in astonishment.

"Any pains in the lumbar region? No? Well, if you ever should have, come to me. I'm on the track of something, if I'm not mistaken. Good-bye." And Fred found himself in the street.

It was only a step now to Dora's flat, and he turned in that direction, walking slowly. He hesitated about going there. He felt now, under the influence of the doctor's story, that the Dora he had known would be there no longer; that he would meet a new Dora portentous with the agony of the hidden tragedy he had discovered, a symbol of the whole gloomy history of that constant procession of women who become caught between the relentless wheels of justice and of social castigation. He felt this, but he did not know that he felt it. But while he realized that somehow he was looking at her from a different point of view, this point of view had in it even more of fear than of pity. She stood for the power to

endure in silence the humiliations and disgrace resulting from a transgression of the laws of society, which she had been too weak to resist. And in that power Fred recognized something which roused in him for her a respect which had almost something of fear in it! But in spite of her strength her weakness had ruined her! It had always been so and always would be. If a woman could n't behave herself she must be made to suffer for it. Fred and the husband were taking the same point of view. If a woman did certain things — and was caught — she was bound to pay the penalty, and that was all there was to it. Would Mrs. Richmond, for instance, allow herself to get into a scrape of that kind? Not much! She was too much of a lady. Women still being, in Fred's mind, divided indisputably into two classes: ladies and the other kind. Ladies being always absolutely inviolate; the other kind not, in varying degrees. Well, as far as he was concerned, he would n't allow it to make any difference. If you had asked Fred what he meant by not allowing it to make any difference, he would n't have been able to tell you.

CHAPTER XIII

HAVING arrived at this rather nebulous decision, Fred, who had been walking slowly up and down, turned in at the entrance to the Kilkenny, and rang the bell.

The automatic opener above, released the latch of the front door and he ascended and rang again. He could hear voices. Rose opened the door and he went in. The place seemed full of people with cups of tea before them or highball glasses, but there were really — besides Dora — only Vera Wildwood, the Blomfield sisters, Max Bebel, and two young men whom he had never seen.

Max was on the piano stool, the Blomfield sisters occupied the two arms of a stout, upholstered easy-chair, in whose depths reclined the shorter of the two young men Fred had not seen before, Dora was at the tea-table, Vera Wildwood on her knees poking the fire, and the other young man, the taller one, was standing by the piano, on the top of which rested his cup of tea. The room was warm and intimate and pervaded with an atmosphere of friendship and good spirits which struck Fred as something he must not lightly throw away. After the cold isolation of his new rooms — or so they now seemed compared with Dora's cosiness — the knowledge came to him that he had been homesick.

As he entered, he noticed that the joyous chatter

which had surged out as Rose opened the door, had stopped. Dora greeted him with perfect friendliness, but he was conscious of the inimical glances of the others, and all at once he understood that his rudeness to Dora had a more serious aspect than he had realized. In affronting Dora he had affronted all Kilkenny, and while Kilkenny was not in his estimation intrinsically worth a second thought, he suddenly perceived that, as Dora's intimacy with it had been resumed, he could not afford to disregard its hostility if he wished to continue to enjoy the comforts which Dora had to offer.

He saw that he must rack his brains for some stroke by which to gain their confidence, and as he did so an idea came to his rescue — an ingenious lie — and to make an opening he began with another, saying to Dora:

"Where were you this morning? I tried to get you on the telephone, to explain about last night, but the operator said nobody would answer!"

"It beats all how often that does happen," remarked Millicent, with an air of sympathetic interest intentionally overdone. "We get so many 'no answer' reports that our telephone's practically useless! Say, Dora, the next time you've got something important to say, don't waste your time trying to get me on the 'phone, send up a note!"

"You can kid me if you want to," answered Fred, adopting a frank and hearty manner, "but it's the truth, and I'm going to explain to everybody here why I did n't come last night and that will be the truth, too!"

"Nobody said it would n't!" answered Muriel.

"I know you did n't," said Fred, "but you've made up your mind that you're not going to believe me and I'll tell you what *I'm* going to do. I'm going to give you two different explanations of why I did n't come to Dora's party. One is the true reason and the other's made up. I'll bet you'll believe one of them and it will be the one that is n't true!"

"Two stories," cried Max, "that vill take too long to tell it!"

"No it won't!" answered Fred. "The first explanation is that I lay down on my bed to smoke a cigarette just before I was going to begin to get dressed for the party, and when I woke up it was four o'clock in the morning." Fred paused. "The second is that Dora and I had a quarrel the night before the party and I stayed away on purpose. I came here now to apologize!"

Everybody looked immediately at Dora, who flushed. There was an uncomfortable silence broken immediately by a shout of laughter from Fred. Fred laughed all the more heartily because he was glad to hear himself once more. "There, what did I tell you! The real reason was that I went to sleep. Did we have a quarrel, Dora, night before last? Of course not! I ought to have won some money on that!"

"You story-writers are too smart," retorted Millicent, but her manner was distinctly more friendly. "I suppose that's what you call psychology!"

"Do you know that was an interesting experiment!"

interposed Peter. "Come to think of it, ninety-nine people out of a hundred would have believed the story of the quarrel just as we did, but why?"

"Simply because it was less commonplace," answered Ted.

"That can't be the reason! If it was, the more extravagant a story the more easily you could get people to believe it!"

"Only in so far —" began Ted, when Millicent Bromfield interrupted: "Holy mackerel, if they are n't arguing again! Say! This is n't Harvard!" — upon which Peter and Ted broke off, and Dora said, turning to Fred:

"We have all been congratulating Mr. Watergate, Fred; his first novel has just been accepted by White-worth! And I have n't introduced you! This is Mr. Watergate and this is Mr. Blakie!"

Fred shook hands, congratulated Peter, and turned to Dora.

"But what about the party? Was it a success?"

"*Was* it!" cried Muriel. "Auntie Wagstaff was in no condition to go home to the Bronx alone, and Dora could n't get any one to take her, so she had to stay here all night. Wadham Robinson tried to kiss one of the young ladies from the dry-goods shop across the way, and got his face slapped; one of our young men fell upstairs and barked his chin; I met Steve on the street this afternoon and he claimed that somebody stole a pair of brand-new dollar-and-a-half gloves out of his overcoat pocket — but that's just because he's sore, and Ickel-

heimer — so his Misses told me on the 'phone this morning — had a fight with his taxicab driver when they got home, about the fare, and got himself arrested! Say, it was some party! And Maxy here, he sure did play! Oh, Maxy! *Please* play that new fox-trot, just once!"

"Why, Muriel," Dora cried in remonstrance, "anybody would think it was awfully rowdy! It was n't at all!"

Max, nothing loath, had started the fox-trot, and Muriel danced a step or two before answering.

"Of course it was n't. It was the nicest party I ever went to, but yours always are, Dora. That's the trouble! They're so nice, you never remember to go to bed. Isaacs said this afternoon, 'What's the matter with you girls? You've got no pep! Battin' too much, I suppose, eh?' he says. Then he says, 'I wish now, I had n't given you that box for to-night!' 'It's too late now, Mr. Isaacs,' I says, 'our party's all made up. Besides, my God, we've got to have *some* amusement!'"

"A box party, eh?" said Fred; "I don't suppose I'm in on it, am I?"

There was a slight pause, a slight hiatus of silence in the room, and then Millicent answered, cordially enough:

"Sure! Come along! We need another man!" And Fred knew that he was to be given another chance. He noticed, too, that a certain anxious suspense in Dora's manner which had shown itself when he had put his question, had given way to a brightening smile of relief.

"Then I'll want you all to come to supper with me afterwards at the Alcazar! Is that a go?" he asked.

"Is it!" answered Muriel and Millicent together; "just watch us!" the Alcazar being the newest and most expensive of Broadway restaurants. The others accepted, too, and Fred went to the telephone to reserve a table.

"You're good at ordering," he called to Dora, with his ear at the telephone; "let's order it now. What do *you* say, Muriel; Miss Wildwood?"

A menu was quickly selected, and, while Fred was transmitting it, the others began to take their departure. Vera, Max, Fred, Ted, and Peter were to assemble at Dora's flat at eight. Muriel and Millicent after their turn was finished would join them in the box.

While Fred still sat at the telephone the last of Dora's guests disappeared through the door, and, as she stood looking out of it for a parting word, Fred noticed her hand which rested on the knob, with its rounded wrist, and suddenly its whiteness, its softness touched Fred with an unusual and poignant understanding. It proclaimed with its delicate texture, its feminine contours and movements, so instantly with such intense clearness woman's place in society and the disadvantages she staggers under in the struggle for existence, that the emotions of tenderness, of compassion which he had felt once before returned to him and with them feelings of constraint and of shyness.

He hung up the receiver, and to hide these emotions

surveyed the new opening into his former parlor which was now completely finished, with a jamb stained to match the old woodwork. Dora had closed the door and come back into the room. They were alone together.

"Well, this is great!" he exclaimed. "Great! What a difference it makes! But you'll need more furniture, Dora!"

"Yes, I'm going to get some. Come and sit down, Fred. You have n't had your tea. Tell Rose to bring some hot water."

Rose brought the water and disappeared. Fred, still under the influence of that strange shyness, did not sit down until, remembering that Vera had poked the fire, he had poked it too. Then at last, taking the easy-chair lately occupied by Ted, he held out his hand for his cup, saying:

"This seems like old times!"

Dora laughed. "The old times are n't so very old, Fred. You had tea here day before yesterday!"

"That's so," he answered, "but it seems longer." And then he added, "Well, I've been getting it in the neck to-day!"

"What do you mean, Fred?"

"Richmond has decided not to take the new book!"

"Fred!"

Fred went into particulars, adding: "And that's not all. Strauss, of the Progressive Film Company, says that the scenario I wrote for him is not satisfactory, which means rewriting that, too, I suppose. I don't mind so

much about the book, because I can offer it to some one else or take my time about rewriting it, but Strauss is put out about the scenario and must have it right away. I tried to work it out this morning, but I'm afraid I've got to rewrite the whole thing!"

"What does n't he like about it, Fred?"

"You remember the end of it," Fred explained, "where Clarence, the newsboy, can't stand the brutality of his stepfather any longer and commits suicide by blowing out the gas?"

"Yes, I remember. What dreadful things the movies are, Fred!"

"The movie managers seem to know what they want. Well," Fred continued, "as Strauss pointed out, if Clarence blows out the gas, he will be dying in the dark and the audience won't be able to see him!"

Dora laughed; then stopping short she exclaimed: "I have it! Was n't Clarence's father always trying to get his money away from him and had n't Clarence hidden some in his room?"

"Yes," said Fred, "under his mattress!"

Dora laughed again.

"Then all you've got to do is this." And she explained her idea.

It was so complete a solution that Fred was captivated.

"Say, that's splendid!" He looked at his watch. "Hello, it's half-past five. I promised to let Strauss know by five. I must call him up." He sprang to the

telephone, and presently the unforgettable tones of Mr. Strauss's voice sounded over the wire.

"I've fixed that up for you," Fred announced; "it won't be necessary to cut out or rewrite anything!"

"Vy not?" Mr. Strauss's voice sounded almost ominous.

"Clarence blows the gas out just as he always has —"

"But, Mr. Filbeart —" A note of exasperation was beginning to sound in Mr. Strauss's voice.

"Wait a minute," Fred called. "He blows the gas out and his stepfather, who does n't know he's home, comes in with a candle to steal his savings. There is an explosion which does away with the old man, and Clarence is carried into another room — brightly lighted — in a dying condition, where, after he has distributed his toys to his little friends, he passes away. You see we don't change anything! Only add a little and get a chance for a great effect with the explosion!"

There was silence at the other end of the telephone.

"Well, how do you like it? What do you think of it?" asked Fred, a little uneasily.

"Mr. Filbeart," came Strauss's voice at last, charged with a mixture of emotion and respect, "Mr. Filbeart, you are a cheniuous! That is a ferry original idea. It is wonnerful, wonnerful, Mr. Filbeart!"

"Glad you like it," answered Fred, delighted. "I'll write it out and send it around to you in the morning."

"I vould like to talk vit you aboud an exclusive contracd, Mr. Filbeart. Ven couldt you come ant see me?"

"Well, I'm pretty busy," Fred answered.

"Would ten in the morning suit you, Mr. Filbeart?"

"I'll try to get there," answered Fred. "If I can't I'll telephone you."

He hung up the receiver with a smile of broad satisfaction, and turning to Dora said:

"You helped me out of a hole that time, Dora!"

Dora looked at him with a look which was all woman. A look which included tenderness, understanding, tolerance, amusement, and a little — just a little — indulgent contempt, but Fred did not notice.

CHAPTER XIV

DORA, Vera, Max, Ted, and Peter were waiting for Fred in Dora's parlor, Max, as usual at the piano.

"Haf you heardt the music of the 'Spyglass,' yes?" he asked.

Everybody had seen the "Spyglass" when it had first been put on, two or three months before, but had forgotten most of the music.

"But they blay it everywhere. Vat Muriel and Millicent dance to more than any! Zo!" And he began throwing out with a deft hand coil on coil of the music to which Muriel and Millicent danced. "Id is foolishness," he said, "put if you know it vell so that the orchestra blays itself to you and there is no effort needet to grasp it, then you vill enjoy more, the dancing. Zo!" And he began to hum the air, buzzing like a great bee.

All five had dined together at Adolph's, omitting Adolph's *café noir*, which was wretched, and Rose was making some in the kitchen. Dora went to the window saying, "Fred is late," and Vera, standing before the fire and humming, too, as she swayed rhythmically to the time, answered, "What does it matter? Life is good!"

Max laughed his rich, boyish laugh.

"Andt it is zo easy to make it goot," he answered. "A little money, a few friendts, a goot dinner now and then, and music!"

"And is that all? No fame, Max?" cried Vera. "No Herr Max Bebel singing Siegfried at the Metropolitan? No Mr. Watergate or Mr. Blakie making great names in poetry and fiction?"

"Nein!" exclaimed Max. "Nein! As ve are! Id is better zo!"

"Why, Max!" cried Dora.

Max laughed again and with a flourish began the dance music once more. He turned to Peter. "Haf you got it now?" — and once more his musical buzzing filled the room.

Rose came in with the coffee.

"How fragrant!" cried Ted. "Now for a cigar and we will have done our duty by little Adolph's dinner."

"I've got it," said Peter all of a sudden, and, pursing up his lips, a cascade of liquid notes poured from them, soaring high, flashingly, as if dropped from the iridescent throat of some brilliant bird balanced somewhere within depths of shade and sunlight.

"Bravo!" cried Max; "don't stop!" And they went through the whole air; rag-time waltz, one-step, mazurka, or whatever it may have been.

Whistling was Peter's one accomplishment. He loved it, but he was too shy to display it often in public, and now, after a final trill and Max's concluding chord, he looked about him smilingly, but with a heightened color.

"Mr. Watergate!" exclaimed Dora; "that was wonderful! I did n't know that whistling could be so lovely! Do it again!"

"Oh, no, not now, thank you. Come, Max! Drink your coffee!"

"Does n't he ever whistle on the other side of your little curtain?" asked Vera.

"Sometimes," answered Ted, "when he has forgotten that I'm there. I keep very quiet then so as not to frighten him away!"

"I would whistle the whole day if *I* had got a novel accepted," said Dora.

"Peter *did* whistle all that day, I believe," said Ted.

"I say, let's talk about something else," remonstrated Peter.

"There's the bell!" Fred had arrived in one taxi conveying another. Dora opened the window and signalled that they were coming down. Wraps were hurried into; they descended to the sidewalk and, climbing in, the taxicabs began cruising over the rough pavements like tugs in a stormy harbor. At the end of the street at Longacre a veil of ruddy light hung in the air, and as they approached it, the roadway became more and more congested with motors, until they were compelled to stop. From Longacre and from all about them a din of sounds came, gongs, horns, voices, clattering hoofs, and a steady uproar compounded of other noises less specific. Presently the regiment of motors began to move, slowly at first, but with increasing impetus, until, turning quickly to the north, they came out into the open space of the square lighted with constellations of electric globes, pale mauve, white, and yellow, and by

the fantastic moving mechanisms on the surrounding roofs.

The whole floor of the square was a mass of electric cars, taxis, people, and private motors crossing in what seemed inextricable confusion. On all sides the enormous maws of the theatres opened hideously, and through the high windows of the hotels gilded mouldings could be seen, columns, curtains, and the architraves of doorways all burnished by dazzling clusters of many lights.

The taxis stopped before the theatre in which the "Spyglass" was being played, and two negroes in livery opening the doors the party descended and began walking swiftly up the inclined plane of the foyer to where Authority with a large paunch, dressed in a dress suit and wearing a ruffled top hat, waited beside a brass gateway to see that they carried the proper credentials. This barrier having been successfully passed, and two young men repulsed who strenuously solicited the privilege of checking their wraps, they next encountered a youth in uniform who, with extreme accuracy, thrust as they passed a programme under the armpit of each, and pushing open one of a series of green baize doors they found themselves in a large auditorium whose only illumination came from the brilliant light flooding the stage. A lady usher who was dressed in the uniform of a West Point cadet, except that skirts instead of trousers concealed her lower limbs, haughtily took Fred's coupons, but on perceiving that they indicated a box her manner thawed slightly — people who oc-

cupy boxes always being, for some reason, of more importance than those who modestly occupy orchestra stalls at from two and a half to seven dollars apiece — and skirting the rear row of seats led them down a side aisle, and up three steps into a small cavern provided with and completely filled by eight chairs, arranged in two rows of four each. These chairs had seats about the size of the average stove lid, very straight backs, and no arms. The lady usher helped Dora, Vera, Max, Ted, Fred, and Peter to remove their wraps, waited a moment for a tip, and not getting one, through inadvertence on the part of Fred, went out, deftly managing — as she drew the curtain hanging at the entrance — to dislodge the gentlemen's hats; their reverberations as they struck the floor causing a number of people in the audience to turn and glance angrily toward the box.

As it was quite impossible to see the stage from the four rear chairs, Dora, Vera, Fred, and Peter occupied the first row, while Max and Ted, after restoring the hats to their hooks, stood up.

The "Spyglass" was a musical comedy of the usual order, where the leading lady and the leading gentleman sing the usual number of duets, where the two comedians may be trusted to appear at just the right moment to liven things up, and where the village populace is always flocking into view or out of it with surprising unanimity; but its success was really due to the hit made by Muriel and Millicent. Therefore, while

Fred's party laughed light-heartedly at the witticisms of the overworked popular librettist, they were impatient for the end of the second act, the dance coming during the intermission between it and the third. The curtain descended at last and then went up again swiftly, the orchestra plunged with a crash into the violently rapid music Max had been playing earlier, and with a flash of bare arms and shapely silk tights the Blomfield sisters were whirling through their dashing and complicated evolutions.

It was a dance performed in alliance with a series of the most difficult acrobatics. An extraordinary and really thrilling display of combined agility and grace. Peter had seen it before, as he had told Millicent, and he had watched it then breathlessly, but now that he knew them their performance became enormously more exciting and more, it seemed to him, significant. Both girls possessed the symmetry, the tapered strength, which one sees in almost all acrobats, and they did not hesitate to display it, and in those swelling lines one could read the secret of the lightness and buoyancy of movement with which they executed their difficult feats; as light, as buoyant as if they were tossing enchantingly, without effort, on those strong waves of sound rising from the orchestra below them. It was a lovely and yet astonishing combination of rhythmical motion and of feats of strength carried out with extraordinary dash and precision.

The sound waves from the orchestra stopped sud-

denly and through the roar of others beating in on them from the auditorium they came toward the front of the stage, leaped into the air in a final somersault, as lightly as if they had been thrown upward by invisible springs, and, bowing, quickly disappeared. The applause increased with a note of insistence not to be ignored, and presently the dance was in part repeated, but even then the audience, determined to see them once more, refused to stop until, coming out again, they danced to the footlights and stood there bowing.

"It's marvellous!" exclaimed Ted to Peter; "they don't seem to have turned a hair."

Peter had been thinking that, too. From the tops of their little hats, fastened at an angle to the sides of their heads, to the points of their high-laced silver boots, they looked immaculately perfect. As they stood in the supernal glare of the spot-lights he could not see that their powdered bosoms, shining softly white, rose with the slightest acceleration, or that their smiling lips betrayed any increased effort for breath. They stood for another moment or two, the ineffably clear and searching lights of the calciums glistening on their eyes and teeth, and then danced from view, Millicent, as she disappeared, throwing a kiss in their direction.

"Well," said Fred, "I take my hat off to Muriel and Millicent."

"I feel," said Vera, "as if I should never be able to rest until I had learned to do exactly what they have been doing to-night."

"Why, they're athletes!" exclaimed Ted; "most wonderful athletes!"

Peter said nothing. A vision of lightness and power still moved before his eyes, a figure of enchanting symmetry, with a little hat stuck roguishly on one side, dazzling teeth, darkened eyes shining in the calcium, a pair of dancing, pointed, high-laced, high-heeled silver boots; and he was wishing that the kiss which Millicent had thrown had been meant for him. Even so may the idiosyncrasies of the imaginative temperament lead it often astray.

The curtain ascended on the last act, and presently something stirred in the darkened recesses of the box and Muriel and Millicent were there. Peter jumped up to give Muriel his place, but Millicent asked Fred not to move and took one of the rear chairs. Peter seated himself beside her. Max Bebel and Ted remained standing. Peter stole a glance toward her and, perceiving that she was sitting quite still as if resting as she looked toward the stage, he leaned toward her and asked, "Are you tired?" and to his surprise he found himself putting a hand over one of hers which rested on her knee, close to him.

Millicent turned her face toward his, smiled, and drew her hand slowly away.

"Not much," she answered; "in ten minutes I shall be O.K.!" She stopped, hesitated for a moment, and then added, "Did you like it?"

"Wonderfully! Wonderfully!" answered Peter; they

were talking in whispers, their heads close together. "You will make a great name for yourself. Genée is n't in it with you. How have you learned? Are n't you happy to feel that you have made such a tremendous success?"

"Yes," answered Millicent; "but what I like best about the whole thing is just the feeling which physical strength gives you. The applause is all right enough, but in a little while that's over and forgotten, but just you stand on a pocket handkerchief with your feet close together, jump into the air, turn over, and come down on the handkerchief again as light as can be and always in the same place. That's something, is n't it? — and it's one of the easiest things we do. Put your hand on my arm!" She extended her rounded arm, and, as Peter rested his hand on it, she clenched hers and brought it slowly up toward her shoulder. Under its soft contour he could feel powerful muscles swelling, and all at once she seized his hand with a grip which wrung from him an involuntary, smothered cry of pain. Millicent laughed and set him free.

"I'll wrestle with you some day, or box, if you know how," she whispered.

"I don't," answered Peter.

"Then I'll teach you! Would you *like* to know how? Every man ought to!"

"I would," answered Peter, with a feeling of humiliation. "Are you in training all the time?"

"All the time. Dora's party last night and the Alcazar this, is going the limit for us!"

"It is for me, too," answered Peter; "to-morrow morning the grind begins again."

"Right-o," answered Millicent; "but it's a good grind all the same!"

Although their interest in the "Spyglass" had come to an end with the conclusion of Muriel and Millicent's dance, they waited until the finale — in order not to arrive at the Alcazar at too early an hour — and then commandeering two other taxicabs crossed the square in them to the restaurant, a distance of two hundred feet. The fixed tariff for this journey was thirty cents, but on Fred's adding to each fare an additional fifteen as a tip the taxicab drivers emitted vigorous manifestations of contempt and drove off hooting while the supper party, filing one by one through the revolving doors, joined a motley assemblage in evening clothes waiting before a thick red velvet rope, guarded by two head waiters, for admission to the restaurant.

On Fred's giving his name, they were admitted and conducted to the table which had been reserved for him. The room was already well filled, but that decorum or reserve which permeates a place of refreshment, before the refreshments have begun their insidious operations, had not yet been banished, and they seemed to move over the thick carpet and to settle themselves in the soundless upholstery of their seats in the midst of a kind of anticipatory hush which even the vigorous strains of the orchestra could not dissipate.

But although the room seemed well filled, more and

more people were being admitted past the velvet rope and places were being continually found for them. Peter was watching them. They would take their seats, six or eight, look about them absently, with elbows on table, and address each other with a few perfunctory remarks. While one member of a party usually did the ordering, the preoccupation of the others became more marked, declining rapidly into an attitude of boredom mingled with self-consciousness, in spite of the efforts of one of their number, always a woman, to strike a few conversational sparks, always with such indifferent success that she, too, would relapse presently into an attitude of unhappy abstraction. After this for a short time the party would sit in a circle in silence in various attitudes of listlessness.

Presently a waiter would appear carrying on a tray a group of cocktails corresponding exactly in number to the number of diners at that particular table. Involuntary covert smiles would then appear, and, in an instant, the cocktail glasses would be set down empty. Almost immediately the first dish would arrive, and, simultaneously, the sound of a champagne cork leaving its bottle would strike the ear. The expressions of the diners were now rapidly undergoing a change, and as if the cocktail had unlocked a compartment containing the conversational abilities of each, all now began to talk and laugh without cessation, glasses were being continually raised, jaws were working, heads being turned to the right and left, voices were raised contin-

ually higher and higher. And as this process was going on at every table the noise and confusion increased in proportion.

Through the soft rain of musical sounds, descending as if in a shower from the ceiling above, moved the retainers of the house in their dress coats and white aprons, bearing dishes of infinite variety and size, the omnibuses disappearing with *débris*, and the captains reprimanding impartially. The immense room was full of tobacco smoke, the clatter of dishes, conversation, music, loud laughter, and other emanations such as are given off by such an aggregation of human beings. Peter looked at these human beings. Here and there among the faces around him he discovered touches of distinction, traces of ideality, but these heartening indications he observed were to be found mainly among the waiters, the patrons themselves exhibiting, almost without exception, depressingly materialistic physiognomies.

From an inspection of the surrounding tables he turned to his own. Was there one face here which had the quality of arresting attention, setting the imagination at work and arousing speculation? One, yes, Dora's! Instinctively he felt that life had been at work there and on a fine nature, but with what result he could not tell. Vera's face told nothing except a tale of health and of the vigorous preferences of youth. Muriel and Millicent displayed these, too, with an added sharpness which indicated training in a harder school, but with Dora he felt that her soul itself had been under a pres-

sure which a knowledge of might yield to the psychologist surpassing fruits.

Fred's waiter now appeared, exactly as all the other waiters had, with a group of cocktails on a tray, eight of them, the party being eight in number, and almost immediately the same phenomenon was exhibited at this table which all the others were going through with. There were hurried nods and good wishes over the rims of the glasses, an eager draining of them, and in another moment they were resting, empty, on the tablecloth; but just as they had put them to their lips, the orchestra burst into the music of Muriel and Millicent's dance, some warm, exhilarating current seemed to run quickly around the table, and certain of the diners close at hand, recognizing the dancers, nodded with expressions of admiration and raised their glasses.

"Here!" cried Fred, "open that champagne!" And presently a friendly interchange took place, a tossing off to the favorites of the moment. People began to tell one another and the waiters to spread the news that the Blomfield sisters were present, and for a time their table was quite the centre of attraction, to the immense satisfaction of Ted and Peter, who had never been out to supper with real actresses before in their whole lives.

At Fred's right sat Dora, at his left Muriel, next to her Ted, next to Ted, Vera, next to Vera, Max, next to Max, Millicent, and between Millicent and Dora, Mr. Peter Watergate.

Some very good dishes now began to circulate; Fred

was no niggard with his champagne and everybody felt happy.

"By the way," called Fred across the table to Vera, "what relation are you to Charles Richmond?"

"What made you think I was any?" asked Vera.

"Because I was lunching to-day with him and his wife and —"

"Well, he's my cousin," answered Vera without waiting to hear any more.

"My word!" Muriel exclaimed, "you can't read any society column without seeing Mrs. Charles Richmond's name in it. I wish *I* had some swell relatives. Do you ever see anything of them, Vera?"

"Sometimes," answered Vera, laughing.

"Mrs. Richmond is a very distinguished-looking woman," remarked Fred authoritatively; adding, "Don't you think so, Miss Wildwood?"

"And Charles is a very extinguished-looking little man. *I* don't know; never thought much about it one way or the other!" answered Vera.

"Oh!" exclaimed Dora, suddenly remembering, "he was at my party!"

"You ought to meet her, too, Dora," continued Fred.

"Ought I?" answered Dora. "All right, I'm willing. Vera, will you introduce me?"

"If I get a chance," replied Vera.

"Does n't she ever come to see you?" inquired Muriel, who was properly impressed.

"Does she know where I live?" asked Vera of Fred.

"Yes, Richmond told her."

"Then I've an idea that she *will* be coming to see me very, very soon," said Vera.

"And who is grandfather?" asked Fred.

"Well, he's just grandfather, that's all!" answered Vera, looking for a moment as if she thought Fred a little too inquisitive; but Fred went on:

"Yours?"

"Yes, and Charles's!"

"Richmond said he owned the Kilkenny."

"Yes, I think he does."

"Whew!" cried Muriel, "so you're an heiress in disguise. I always thought so!"

"I don't know about *that*," answered Vera.

Dora turned to Peter, and with a smile which included Millicent said:

"Come, now, tell us about your book. We just know that it's been accepted and that's all. What's it about?"

"It's not a very pleasant book!" answered Peter. "You don't really want to hear about it now, do you?"

"He's afraid that it might be over my head," said Millicent, "but I've read more than you might think. Rochester Swallow's the one I love. His stories are just elegant. Mr. Filbert's, too. Anything like theirs?"

"Good Lord, no!" exclaimed Peter vehemently, and stopped suddenly. "I meant nothing like Swallow's. I have read Mr. Filbert hardly at all!"

"Well, tell us!" repeated Dora.

"Well, it's about a woman. A woman who had done something that —"

Dora still smiled, but her smile had lost its spontaneity and she turned her head.

"That's Mr. Richmond now, is n't it, Fred?" she exclaimed, all at once interrupting Peter.

Everybody except Vera glanced quickly in the direction she had indicated. Sure enough. Charles Richmond, Mrs. Charles, and a number of other people were just seating themselves at a table not far away.

"That's just who it is! The tall woman is his wife!" Fred beamed and sat waiting a nod of recognition, but for some reason the Richmonds did n't see him.

Not only Charles and his wife, but their entire party seemed to proclaim that they were personages and seemed to expect that two head waiters and quite a swarm of ordinary ones should look after them. They were vivacious and talkative and their uninterrupted flow of conversation and laughter seemed, for some reason, to have a quieting influence on some of Fred's party. The Richmond party presently caught sight of a table of acquaintances in another part of the room, indicated by the waving of hands and amicable gestures, but the Richmonds never seemed to notice Fred, who, with an air of abstraction, was watching them furtively. Muriel was, too. Dora had grown silent, and Vera, while self-possessed and indifferent, not as happy as before. Only Peter and Millicent on one side were absorbed in what

they were saying to each other, Max and Ted on the other.

Discontent had suddenly seized upon Fred. Somehow he felt sure after a time that the Richmonds knew perfectly well that he was there, but were determined to pretend that they did n't. Fred wondered why, and comparing his own party with theirs discovered, or thought he discovered, the reason. About *their* party there plainly was nothing to be ashamed of, *his* consisted of two obvious actresses, pretty enough, but of no account whatever, one of Richmond's poor relations, a discredited divorcée, two young nobodies, and a Dutchman who made a living by playing the fiddle in theatre orchestras. The said Dutchman, moreover, was at that moment making an exhibition of himself by the simple vigor with which he was expounding to Ted his philosophy of life.

"And this is what I'm spending my money on!" exclaimed Fred under his breath. "Hell! That's what I got for going to Dora's this afternoon!"

He felt suddenly out of temper with himself and his guests. Dora noticed it, and did her best to dissipate his ill-humor, while Fred, aware of her efforts, insisted, manlike, on becoming more sulky than ever, finally putting such an effectual damper on the party that, when Dora ceased to struggle and proposed going home, everybody was quite ready to.

Fred paid his bill as if he hated to part with the money, attempted to relieve his feelings by giving the waiter

less than the customary fee, and the party trooped out. Dora proposed walking home, and, as Fred's destination lay in another direction, told him not to bother to come with them. Fred, therefore, said good-night and disappeared, much to everybody's relief.

The Richmonds had spoiled Fred's party. Fred, getting ready for bed, blamed himself, or rather Dora, for having been seen by them in such company, forgetting that he had invited himself and had been mighty glad to go. Vera was depressed because she feared that she was to be let in for more of the family squabbles which she had been trying to escape, and was wishing that she had no relations. Muriel was wishing that she had. Max Bebel was uncomfortable because he thought he had done something, he did n't know what, which had annoyed his host, and Millicent, Peter, and Ted were annoyed because their host had acted the bear and spoiled what ought to have been a jolly evening.

Dora was depressed, too. She always was when she found herself in proximity to that conventional world which had shut its doors on her, and that night, as often happened at such times, just as she was slipping off to sleep she woke for a moment with a start. She thought that she had felt a little downy head stirring against her breast.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN George had epitomized the Longridge family to Fred in the saloon some years before, he had exaggerated the Longridge fortune, giving the popular journalistic estimate of it. And it had been greater at that time than it was now. Longridge was one of those financiers common in America who capitalize their wits and live on the dividends thereof. He figured that his shrewdness represented an investment of three millions. Three millions earning five per cent meant an income of a hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year, which was the least Longridge could get along on if he wanted to live the way he wanted to, and a hundred and fifty thousand a year Longridge spent accordingly.

Longridge, a high-rolling, expansive individual, had migrated one day from Pittsburgh to New York with the avowed intention of "getting there with both feet" financially, socially, and every other way, and he was instigated, aided, and abetted by his wife, a large woman of tremendous energy, an unholy temper, and great ambitions. The motto of each was, "Make it a point to see that you get the luxuries of life. The necessities will take care of themselves." Therefore, they always had a superb house to live in, a box at the opera, and several of the latest things in motors, while being constantly dunned by all the tradesmen in the neighborhood. These

importunities often became almost unbearable, even to people as hardened as Longridge and his wife, but every once in a while Longridge would make a lucky strike, when everybody would be paid up and the thing would start all over again. So it went.

Longridge and his wife had centred great hopes in their only child, Edith. Before she had grown up they had been keenly disappointed in her — she was so extremely plain — but as she matured her plainness disappeared or became modified into another kind which had its merits, and she developed social talents and a kind of sharpness on which Longridge began to build castles in the air. Longridge's superb digestion had been overworked all its life and was beginning to give signs of wear and tear. Longridge's spirits, therefore, began to lose a little of their buoyancy, he began to get tired of the game he had played so long, and often sought enjoyment by looking down a rosy vista at the end of which he descried a very rich son-in-law, so rich, indeed, that the requirements of an expensive father-in-law would not be noticed in the general lavish outflow. The years passed, however, and the wealthy son-in-law did n't materialize. There were plenty of rich and eligible young men about, but Edith had developed into too much of a philanderer. She and her mother were always quarrelling about it, and at times Longridge and his wife grew quite haggard. Winter after winter passed, and, unimpressed by their protestations, Edith went on spending money that Longridge was finding it harder

and harder to make, always deep in an affair with some new admirer who always disappeared in time to give place to another. Once or twice Mrs. Longridge in despair made the mistake of offering up some young man she had chanced on somewhere, who was rich but not eligible, but Edith had learned the climber's art in too good a school and sent the ineligible about their business in a way which wrung emotions of reluctant admiration from her mother.

One morning Longridge left the house at ten as usual and at eleven was back again. He had not been feeling well and had gone to see his doctor. He had come back to tell his wife. The doctor gave him six months. There was an affecting scene. Longridge and his wife had a real affection for one another. Presently Mrs. Longridge, wiping her eyes, dashed from the room and rushed upstairs to take it out on Edith. Edith had a tongue of her own and never forbore to use it in her bouts with her mother, but never had Mrs. Longridge shown such powers of abuse. Edith sat trembling under the lash of her mother's castigation, and that night accepted an offer of marriage from the young man of the moment.

The young man of the moment happened to be Charles Richmond.

Longridge lived to see his daughter married. After his death, to his wife's surprise, his estate yielded her two hundred thousand dollars. Longridge had been dallying with copper and had made a surprisingly good haul just a month before he died.

Longridge, therefore, instead of leaving a large fortune, bequeathed to his wife only a very modest income as incomes are counted in New York. The house and the opera box were given up, most of the motors sold, and Edith and Charles went to live where Charles had always lived before, that is, at the house of his maternal grandfather, Mr. Penfield. In Mr. Penfield's house at this time lived Vera Wildwood, her father, commonly called "Uncle John," Mrs. Richmond, a widow and Charles's mother, Tim, Charles's younger brother, and a very old lady, Mrs. Timothy, a sister of Mr. Penfield's, who was known throughout the house as "Auntie." With the advent of Edith the family consisted of eight people, and a pretty bear-garden it was. Mr. Penfield had given each of his children, Mrs. Wildwood and Mrs. Richmond, half a million on their wedding day. Vera's father promptly lost all of *his* wife's money and Richmond sunk most of *his* in the firm of Richmond Sons & Richmond, where it was likely to stay. Richmond had died some years before, as had Mrs. Wildwood, and Wildwood himself — Uncle John — a charming, amiable fellow, had lived ever since on the generosity of his father-in-law in his house where Vera grew to maturity.

Until Vera grew up — or rather, while she was growing up — her father was a puzzle to her, but gradually she began to understand him, as the most futile of men. She loved him, but she could not avoid recognizing this fact. He was incurably lazy and without a spark of

ambition, but he was an insatiable reader and a good deal of a linguist. Indeed, the only evidence of tenacity he ever displayed was over the study of languages, and if Vera at any time wanted an hour to herself all she had to do was to thrust a grammar into his hand, Spanish, Russian, or Greek, and he would relapse into immediate absorption. When she first realized the conditions under which they were living with her grandfather, she rebelled bitterly, and often reproached her father for consenting to exist as a mere dependent. At these times he would rise quickly, with a pained expression in his eyes, and glance about the room aimlessly as if hoping to find something in the corner to which he could immediately lay his hand for the making of money. Finally agreeing that their position was humiliating and intolerable, he would pick up his hat swearing that he was going to find *some* way out of their difficulties and would disappear. But an hour later, if Vera glanced into his room, there he would be again, ensconced comfortably in his armchair, pipe in mouth, reading a book. She gave it up as a bad job finally, and loved him for what he was, determined not to find fault with him for what he was n't.

Before Edith came to live at Mr. Penfield's, things were n't so bad. The house ran itself — Mrs. Richmond was supposed to run it — and nobody bothered about anything. Mr. Penfield paid the servants' wages and the housekeeping bills, and Charles gave him a cheque on the first of each month for the Richmond family's

share of these expenses. Every once in a while the old gentleman would make Vera a present of a little money for clothes, part of which she would immediately spend on replenishing her father's wardrobe, which always needed it; but when Edith arrived a tremendous upheaval followed.

In the first place, the servants — a comfortable, dowdy lot of flat-footed, middle-aged Irish women — would n't do at all. Mrs. Richmond — Charles's mother — joined issue on this and war was immediately declared between herself and Edith. Peace never was. Armed neutrality was from time to time, but usually they were at it hammer and tongs.

Edith said that she and Charles had a position to keep up, and if they were to live in the house, the house would have to be run to correspond. Nobody had dowdy Irish servants any more!

It had always been good enough for Charles.

Well, Charles was n't a bachelor any longer.

Lots of people had Irish servants.

If people *did* have an Irish maid or two, they were young and smart-looking. A French cook was absolutely necessary, a butler and a footman, one chauffeur, perhaps two, and the usual kitchen-maids, chamber-maids, laundresses, etc., etc.

Mrs. Richmond wanted to know who was going to pay for all this splendor.

Edith did n't care who paid for it! Charles, she supposed!

Well, Mrs. Richmond would see about *that*! *She* had something to say about the firm of Richmond Sons & Richmond. Her income came from it as well as Charles's!

Finally old Mr. Penfield was got down from his room under the roof and a family conclave was held at which Edith delivered an ultimatum.

In the first place, the servants must be replaced — she herself would engage the new ones. In the second place, Mrs. Richmond must relinquish the reins of management absolutely into her hands. In the third place, the entire first floor of the house and the two bedrooms and bath which she and Charles were to occupy must be done over. Said doing over to be under her complete supervision and control. In the fourth place, the small drawing-room must be considered her private sanctorum — Charles already knew what this meant — and if they wanted to give a dinner party they were to be at liberty to do so without feeling that they must ask the rest of the family, unless they felt like it.

Mrs. Richmond said she had never listened to such insults before in her whole life. She had run her father's house for twenty years and she proposed to go on doing it.

"Very well," replied Edith; "then we'll set up our establishment somewhere else."

"How are you going to pay for it?" Mrs. Richmond inquired.

"In the first place," replied Edith, "please understand that I'm going to have it! As to paying for it,

that's another matter! If I can't pay for it, I'll run into debt for it. My father was in debt during his whole lifetime, and let me tell you I know something about running things without any money! I did n't live with him for twenty-five years for nothing!"

This horrible threat completely subjugated Mr. Penfield and Edith got her way. Charles was to contribute a little more, Mrs. Richmond was induced to contribute a little more, too, and the major part was provided by Mr. Penfield, who paid for the doing over of the first floor and Charles's and Edith's bedrooms.

Mr. Penfield at this time was about eighty. He was a little man, very slight, thin, and wiry, with a big nose and a short white beard parted in the middle. The foundation of his fortune had been laid fifty years before in the Southwest carrying Government mails, and he had added to it considerably by speculation in New York real estate. He occupied a large south room on the top floor of his house, the rest of which was given over to the servants, and lived a mysterious life of his own, in which his family took no part. He was very secretive, and no one knew what he did with himself. After Edith's régime began he used the basement entrance and the back stairs. Charles would see him occasionally in a small agent's office in an adjoining street where he seemed to go to gossip about real estate. He ate his breakfast, consisting of mush and milk, in his room, often lunched at home mainly because the rest of the family were almost always out at that time, and almost

always dined at a little restaurant around the corner where he could get the things he liked. Once in a while, if it were very stormy, he would dine at home, when, slipping off the coat and vest he had been wearing during the day, he would, without changing his trousers, don a black dress waistcoat and a little black dress coat with very short tails which he had had for forty years. Edith insisted on everybody's dressing for dinner. During the day he came and went so frequently, leaving no word with anybody, that no one could ever remember whether they had last seen him coming in or going out. He was an enigma. Often during a family argument Vera would watch him, look at his little eyes with their wrinkled, tired eyelids, and wonder what he thought of life in general, he seemed to get so little out of it. But he was a little tough, hard-headed old man, and probably did not expect nearly as much from it as Vera did.

Sometimes, going upstairs to speak to him about something, she would knock at his door and after a moment he would open it. He would always stand close before the opening as if concealing something — although she could look over his head — until he saw who it was, when he would ask her in. He would immediately start off on some commonplace topic, moving restlessly about, and presently turning his head he would let fly unerringly a squirt of tobacco juice into his cuspidor, or, if there was a fire, into the fireplace. There was nothing to conceal that she could see, the room being always scrupulously tidy and bare-looking, without anything

which hinted at an occupation or diversion of any kind, except a pack of very dirty cards lying on a small table, with which he sometimes played solitaire. He was very odd and careless about his clothes: the suit he always wore — and so far as any one could tell it was always the same one — being of a rusty shiny black twill, the coat of the sack variety bound with braid. He always wore a little black bow tie tucked under a turned-down collar of a certain pattern, so low in the neck that Charles had once said you could almost see his sternum.

Charles was ashamed of him, so was Edith; but Vera liked him, and if he would have let her, would have liked him still more. Once or twice in a queer, jerky, shy sort of way he had tried an affectionate caress or two, and once, only once, he had given her a kiss which smelt so strongly of chewing-tobacco that she hoped he would not give her another; but these were about the only demonstrations of any kind she had ever observed. His opinions of the rest of the family were kept locked away in his narrow breast, a profound secret.

After Edith's arrival life became too strenuous at the Penfield house to suit Vera. Edith and her mother-in-law quarrelled constantly. Once in a while Mrs. Longridge blew in and took a hand, and in the evenings Charles helped, siding at one time with his mother, at another with his wife. Mrs. Richmond was a born fighter. She was a well-preserved woman of middle height and sturdy build wearing a widow's cap, an article of apparel never seen in New York now. She was very narrow-

mind and disapproved heartily of Edith's mode of life, excusing Charles's which was about the same.

Vera and Edith got on well enough at first as far as their personal relations were concerned. The latter always left the rest of the family completely out of her plans, but often included Vera, whose life suddenly took on a gaiety it had rarely known before; but she was a rebel by nature and her position at her grandfather's fostered the spirit of rebellion. In addition her indignation grew as she realized the increased burden which Edith's régime obliged her grandfather to carry.

Vera every month was summoned to old Mr. Penfield's room to write out the cheques in payment of the monthly expenses. Old Mr. Penfield would hand her a pile of bills and an equal number of cheques, which he had previously torn from his cheque-book, to prevent, Vera supposed, any chance of her seeing what his balance at this particular bank might be. Vera would make out the cheques, jotting down a list of them for Mr. Penfield to enter in his cheque-book later.

At the family conclave the cost of running the house under the new plan had been figured out, and Charles and his mother had each agreed to pay a small proportionate share; but Vera was staggered to find how enormously beyond the estimates the actual expenditure was, but while Mr. Penfield was paying out monthly a great deal more money than had been allowed for, the proportionate shares of Charles and his mother had remained the same. Vera called her grandfather's atten-

tion to this, with the result that the Richmonds were called upon for more money. Mrs. Richmond paid under protest, and in addition to her comments on Edith's extravagance, began to make it clear that she thought it high time that Uncle John shook off his lethargy and did his share. She ran to Mr. Penfield about it. The whole family were always running to him, which was surprising because nothing ever came of these visits. Mrs. Richmond would run to him because Edith had been rude, and Edith would complain because Mrs. Richmond had. All the servants were continually stopping at his door to lodge some of the complaints or unload the grievances servants are always full of, and every once in a while Uncle John, having been stirred up by Vera, would appear and ask Mr. Penfield to use his good offices in finding employment for him, whereupon Mr. Penfield would look at him solemnly, aim for the cuspidor, make a bull's-eye and, pulling out his watch, would murmur something about an engagement, seize his hat, and go out. He had heard that sort of thing too often to waste his time over it.

The bills grew larger and more numerous. Charles and Edith were making a tremendous splurge and Tim was developing great talent in the art of getting rid of money. Somehow everybody got into the habit of blaming Uncle John for it. If Edith expressed the opinion that Tim was spending altogether too much on silly, boyish extravagances, Mrs. Richmond would hint at the dinner table, in the presence of Vera and her father,

that if everybody did his share it would be much easier for the others, and if Mr. Penfield ventured to protest against the extravagances of Charles and Edith, he would be met by hints that he was showing rank favoritism toward certain other members of the family.

Vera got more and more tired of it. Every one was trying to work Mr. Penfield. She knew that Edith was continually getting him to pay personal bills for her, as were Mrs. Richmond, Charles, and Tim. Vera felt that her own position was a weak one, but while she and her father spent as little as they possibly could, the others seemed to spend as much.

One night everybody appeared at dinner except Mr. Penfield. If there were no guests, the butler William at half-past seven pounded on a Japanese gong which hung under the stairs at the back of the hall. Tim, who was always as hungry as a hunter, was cruising around downstairs somewhere, with plastered hair and red, freshly washed hands and face, waiting for this signal, and, immediately on hearing it, made for the dining-room. While passing William he made a feint as if he intended to punch William's midriff and slid sideways into his chair. William fetched his soup. There were a couple of tablespoonfuls just covering the bottom of the plate. Tim looked at him challengingly.

"The chef says that's all you can have," remarked William with his Swedish accent.

"You go to grass!" exclaimed Tim, and, rolling up his napkin into a solid ball, he launched it at William's

head. William dodged, and Tim, jumping up and stooping to recover his napkin, began pursuing William round and round the table noiselessly on the thick carpet, until, hearing the loud creak of a certain step which always gave notice when any one was descending the stairs, Tim returned to his seat while William disappeared into the pantry, whence he returned presently, still grinning, carrying a small pitcher from which he filled Tim's soup plate. He had taken the soup from the plate himself before he had brought it in. A little joke of his own.

At this moment Auntie appeared, a little old woman, older than Mr. Penfield, but small and spare, too, and looking remarkably like him. William pulled out her chair and she sat down uncertainly.

"Good-evening, Auntie!" said Tim.

Auntie, in her quavering voice, mumbled something — she had hardly any teeth — which sounded like —

"It's going agrain!"

Tim was signalling emphatically to William that he wanted more soup, while William behind Auntie's chair shook his head teasingly.

"What's that, Auntie?"

"It's going agrain!"

"Going to rain?"

"Yes, and Phil won't drink his water!" Phil was a canary. She had had any number of them. Always called Phil.

"All right, Auntie, I'll look at him!"

Vera and her father appeared, and a moment later, Mrs. Richmond. Tim was sitting before his empty soup plate.

"I wish you could wait for the rest of us, Tim," began Mrs. Richmond.

"Well, dinner's at seven-thirty," retorted Tim, "and I get so hungry I can't wait! I thought you were coming to the rink this afternoon, Vera!"

Charles came in and slipped into his chair.

"I found out that I could n't go," answered Vera. "I tried to telephone you."

"Something better came along, I suppose. What was it?" asked Tim.

"That's a secret," replied Vera.

"Not from me," answered Tim. "I've seen you coming out of Tatnall's Business College several times lately."

"Why, Tim, you mean thing!" exclaimed Vera; and Charles turned a horrified face in her direction.

"What have *I* done?" asked Tim.

"Learning how to be a stenographer?" asked Charles ominously.

"No, a typewriter."

"Really?"

"Really! I may ask you for a position later."

An expression of cold disapproval appeared on Charles's face and he did not answer.

"Well, what were *you* doing at the rink?" he asked Tim.

"Skating, of course!" answered Tim, suddenly getting sulky.

"Uncle George says you don't attend to business."

Uncle George was the "and Richmond" of Richmond Sons & Richmond. He was the real head of the firm and an old bachelor. The rest of the family saw almost nothing of him.

"They don't give me anything to attend to," answered Tim. "What's addressing envelopes!"

"You're supposed to learn the business from the bottom up!"

"There's nothing to learn about addressing envelopes," argued Tim. "I've addressed envelopes before. Addressing envelopes does n't teach you anything about the publishing business!"

At this moment, just as Vera was explaining that it was her fault, as she had asked Tim to meet her there, the sound of a motor rose from the street, the front door opened, and voices filled the hall for a moment. Edith's and a masculine one. "Thank you *so* much!" they heard Edith say. "You've been *so* kind!" The masculine voice answered in words not distinguishable from the dining-room. Edith laughed caressingly. "I'm sure you don't mean *that*!" they heard her say. "Au revoir! Au revoir!" The door shut and she hurried upstairs, descending again immediately, and saying casually to the table in general as she took her seat:

"So sorry to be late!"

"I know who *that* was!" remarked Tim. "Lord, was n't he full the other night, though, at the — "

"My dear little Tim, please keep that kind of vulgar gossip to yourself," answered Edith, smiling easily.

"It is n't *gossip*," answered Tim. "I *saw* him!"

"Burridge?" asked Charles.

Tim answered in the affirmative, and Charles ventured a guffaw. It delighted him to hear unfavorable comment about Edith's admirers.

"Phil won't drink any wanner," Auntie suddenly announced in a quavering voice.

"Burridge does n't like it either," said Tim, and gave way suddenly to mirth.

"Are you trying to annoy me?" asked Edith, looking Tim in the eye.

"Well, I *did* see him," he repeated, giggling nervously as youngsters sometimes do when arguing with their elders. "I did see him! At the club. Full as a goat!"

"Is that the kind of language you've brought your son up to use, my dear mother?" asked Edith with ominous smoothness.

"I'm surprised at you, Tim!" said Mrs. Richmond, and Tim subsided. "But, anyway," she went on, "I can't see that using such language is any worse than associating with people who give occasion for the use of it!"

"Would you mind repeating that?" asked Edith.

"Not at all," answered Mrs. Richmond, and she did. Edith got quickly up from the table.

"My dear Charles, if you can't keep your family from deliberately annoying me, I shall see that they don't have the opportunity!" And then, noticing that William stood at her elbow with a dish of asparagus, she sat down again, remembering that she was hungry, and helped herself. This struck Uncle John as humorous and he had the misfortune to chuckle as he said in a conciliatory way:

"Well, well, after all, boys will be boys!"

"But they need n't be ragamuffins unless they've been badly brought up any more than they need develop into useless members of society!" retorted Edith.

"Whew!" cried Charles. "When you see a head, hit it! What a nice, harmonious, happy sort of family we are!"

Vera's face had flushed and she turned to Edith.

"Do you think that the lives father and I lead — useless as they are — are any more so than yours, or Charles's?"

"My dear Vera, please remember that Charles works for his living," interposed Mrs. Richmond.

"And that the Richmond family enjoys a social position they never had before," added Edith, who was never backward about blowing her own trumpet.

"I've found out what that means," answered Vera. "It means trying to avoid knowing people you think it won't help you to know, and trying to know other people who are trying to avoid *you*! If you call that helping the Richmond family, I don't. And, anyway, we're not

throwing grandfather's money away right and left. We spend as little as we possibly can."

"That's the least you can do!" retorted Charles.

This time Vera jumped up. Luckily she had finished her dinner.

"This is a miserable, hateful, sordid, contemptible family!" she cried in a trembling voice. "And it's your fault!" looking fiercely at Edith. "Before you came we were fairly decent and self-respecting. Now we do nothing but quarrel. It's impossible for us to spend half an hour together any longer without descending to the most degrading personalities and rudenesses. I'd rather starve than put up with it any longer! And as for father and me being a burden, we are, but we are not going to be any —"

"Shut up, will you!" cried Charles roughly. He had suddenly noticed that William, holding the roast beef which he had just removed from the table, was standing with his mouth open and legs apart staring at Vera, fascinated.


"No, I won't!" cried Vera in return. "You say we're a burden, but if you paid grandfather as much as you agreed to pay, and Aunt Charlotte, too, if father and I spent twice as much as we do, grandfather would save money. There, I've said what I wanted to, mean and disgusting as it is, and I'm going to leave this house for good!" And dashing down her napkin she ran out of the room, rushed upstairs, threw herself on her bed, and had a good cry after the manner of women, leaving a

very chastened tableful downstairs. Presently some one came and knocked at her door. She knew it was her father, but did not answer, and in a moment he went away. After a time she got up, bathed her eyes with cold water, unlocked her door, went out, and listened. The house was very still. Edith and Charles, she knew, had an engagement, and Tim was sure to be out. She descended to the first floor, looked through the various rooms, and, finding them empty, went to the telephone and called up Uncle George Richmond's bachelor abode. Contrary to her expectations Uncle George was at home and could see her. Vera hurried into her coat and hat and took a Lexington Avenue car uptown. In an hour she was back again, and going up to her grandfather's room, she knocked. She feared that he might have gone to bed, as it was after half-past nine, but in a moment he opened his door and asked her in. The room smelt of some kind of very rank tobacco which her grandfather had been smoking in a very black, old, battered briar-wood pipe. On his little table the dirty pack of cards was laid out. He had been playing solitaire.

"I want to speak to you, grandfather!"

"All right, sit down!"

The old man began to circle about restlessly as he always did when anybody came to see him, and Vera thought: "He thinks I'm either going to complain about something or ask him a favor! That's all any of us ever come to see him about!" And a sudden remorse filling her, she repeated her thought in words.



"Poor grandfather! I've come to ask you a favor and I hate to. It seems to me that that's what all of us are always doing!"

"Nonsense," the old man replied in his jerky way. "Nonsense, *you* don't!" And then, suddenly switching off, "Did you hear the news? Phil's dead!"

"Oh, what a pity. When, grandfather?"

"Just now. It's your auntie's fault. She forgets to feed them. We'll have to get another one to-morrow!"

"Has any one taken it away?"

"Yes, William and I buried it in the back yard," answered the old man with relish. He was delighted when anything turned up which served as an outlet for some of his superabundant energy. "Under the ailanthus tree. You see your auntie does n't like any one to feed them except herself, and whenever Mary" — a maid — "fills the seed cup she does n't like it and takes it out. After that she forgets to put it back again, so Mary says. Your auntie's getting old. You wanted to ask me about something?"

Vera got up and shut the door.

"Did you know that I've been learning how to use a typewriter, grandfather?"

"Tatnall's Business College, is n't it?" said Mr. Penfield.

"You do know, then! Charles was horrified when *he* heard about it."

Mr. Penfield made no comment on this statement.

"Grandfather, father and I are unhappy here. Do

you think it would be very mean of us if we went away? I want father to earn his own living and I want to earn mine; we should be so much happier!"

"If it would make you happier, do it!" answered the old man.

"And you would n't mind? You would n't think it degrading for us to?"

"Stuff!" replied Mr. Penfield. "But I'm afraid your father can't earn anything. He's a student," as if being a student covered a multitude of sins — and excuses. "I don't believe he can earn any money!"

"Yes, he can, grandfather. I've just been to see Uncle George and he has promised to give him a position as reader for the firm. He will pay him twenty-five dollars a week!"

"What's a reader?" And Vera explained.

"And what are *you* going to do?" asked Mr. Penfield.

"I don't know yet. I'll find something."

"I might make you an allowance," he suggested, as if he thought that he was expected to make such an offer.

"No, grandfather, I won't take anything. I'm going to make my own way in the world!"

"Well, it's my bedtime," said grandfather; "let's think it over."

The next morning Mr. Penfield sent for Vera.

"Don't you want an allowance?" he asked as soon as she came in.

"No, grandfather, thank you, I don't."

"Well, I've been thinking. There are a couple of

small flats in an apartment house I own, that might do for you and your father. They have been thrown together and might do. You're welcome to them if they would. Would you like to see them?"

They went together to the Kilkenny and looked at them, and Vera, finding that they would do very well, said that she would take them, although she resolutely declined her grandfather's offer to let her have them rent free.

One day Vera and Uncle John disappeared. She had got a situation in the offices of one of the suffrage societies. She did n't want any one in the family to know where they were or what they were doing. She had had enough of them to last a long time and Mr. Penfield could be depended upon not to tell. As for her father, he was supremely happy. Why had n't they ever thought of it before? He was being paid for doing what he liked above everything else — reading! It seemed preposterous, but it was, nevertheless, true.

CHAPTER XVI

SUNDAY morning at the Kilkenny possessed a charm peculiarly its own. While on the usual week day everybody seemed to be washing, dressing, cooking, or breakfasting at about the same time, the idlers getting up, too, through the stress and stir of the activity around them, on Sunday the day got under way much more slowly. Nine o'clock might come without, through the whole apartment house, a single sound having been heard, except subterranean ones made by Sid in the basement where he was getting ready to send the milk bottles up on the dumb-waiter when they should be called for. The early morning hours would tick themselves drowsily away until presently, from somewhere behind some door, the muffled sound of a kettle being placed on a stove, the running of water, or a loud yawn would part the silence, a voice would follow, a door shut. These sounds, more frequently repeated throughout the house, issued finally from every floor, but gave no indication of energy behind them. They seemed languid, inconsequential; everybody was taking his or her time.

Presently the creak of the dumb-waiter wheels would be heard as Sid hauled it up loaded with bottles. The bottles would be removed at various floors and the dumb-waiter would descend again, always halting with

a bump against the bottom of the shaft. Somebody's milk, cream, or eggs were always missing, whereupon shouts were heard. If Sid was unable to find the strayed articles, there was more or less borrowing up and down the shaft, and it invariably happened that the news-dealer at the corner had forgotten somebody's paper, whereupon Sid had to run out and get it. Voices began to sound more frequently and more vigorously. From the flats of the young men issued laughter and the sound of skylarking. The four young ladies in the third floor back had begun to chatter like the birds of early morning, phonographs began to make music here and there, and soon telephone bells began to ring and answering voices could be heard making engagements for later in the day.

So far no one had gone out, but at noon the exodus began. Often motors manipulated by sporting-looking young men would stop and some of the young ladies would immediately run down, spring into them and be driven away. Wadham Robinson in a top hat and fairly clean spats would descend for a walk on the Avenue before rustling up a luncheon. The moment he had disappeared, Max's piano and Max's tenor voice would ring through the house. Vera and her father would start out for the Park. Gradually the young men by ones and twos would rattle downstairs and disappear, and last of all the Blomfields, sleeping later than the others because of their previous night's work, would descend as tight, short, small, and generally noticeable

as ever. Sid was alone standing on the basement steps with his head just above the level of the sidewalk.

Peter woke up the Sunday morning after Fred's supper at the Alcazar with a hint of a headache. Ted was boiling eggs and making coffee on a gas stove, and the aroma of the latter drew him from his bed and into his clothes.

"How are you feeling?" asked Ted as he came into their sitting-room.

"As if coffee was the only thing worth while in the whole bloomin' universe. Is it ready?"

"Just ready," Ted answered. "A strong hot cupful will make a different man of you!" He poured out Peter's coffee, put his eggs down before him, and then took his own place. They were breakfasting on a corner of their work-table.

"Well, two nights of Tenderloin dissipation will last me for a long time. What do *you* say?"

"*I'm* as fresh as a daisy," answered Ted, "but then, of course, one must work. Selling a sonnet a year to the magazines will never bring enough money in to let a man get married on. With you it's different. How are you going to spend your royalties?"

"Do you think it will sell half as well as 'Dictionary Dan' did?" replied Peter.

"Let's see, that would be fifty thousand," said Ted. "Well, it ought to, it's ever so much better, but then Filbert simply had a lucky strike!"

"I know, if I sell ten thousand I'll be satisfied." Peter was really expecting much more of it than that.

"We had a good time last night, eh?"

"Yes, until Filbert turned sulky about something!"

"He's not a pleasant animal," Peter observed.

"He is n't so bad," answered Ted; "keep on the right side of him and he might introduce you to Richmond."

"What for? I have a publisher, have n't I?"

"Well, you may need another some day."

Peter, who had all at once begun to stare abstractedly at the wall, struck his forehead with his knuckles. "Richmond — Richmond — !" he muttered half to himself. "Here; chuck my bunch of keys over, will you?"

Ted chuckled, and Peter unlocked his trunk, lifted out two trays, and, searching in the bottom, finally produced a letter which he handed to Ted. Ted read:

MRS. CHARLES RICHMOND

— EAST THIRTY — STREET

Introducing MR. PETER WATERGATE

"Never used it?" asked Ted.

"Never thought of it since I got it! Pitt gave it to me just before we left Cambridge! Pitt said he was a cousin or something. Had n't seen her since he was six years old, but said that would n't make any difference. You know what Pitt's like!"

"Yes; when he heard I was going to come here to write for a living he wanted to give me a letter to Howells on the strength of his grandfather having been born in the same town in Ohio. Optimistic chap, Pitt!"

"If I had n't forgotten about it I would have used it, though," said Peter; "but it makes me laugh now that I know the ropes a little better. What good are letters of introduction? If a publisher thinks he can make money by printing your book, he'll print it; if he does n't, he won't. Letters of introduction are no use!"

"Well, they might be," answered Ted; "you can't tell, and, anyway, I'd use this one."

"What for? It would be absurd if Pitt really *had n't* seen her since he was six!"

"Well, do it, just for fun! You hardly know a soul in New York. It can't do you any harm. Go around and leave it this afternoon. Got a card?"

"A couple of dirty ones!"

"Clean one of 'em up with bread-crumbs and leave it at her house with the letter. That's all you have to do. Do you know I'm mighty glad we struck this place. Just think, day before yesterday we did n't know a soul here and see how they've taken us in. That was Miss St. David's doing."

"A jolly Bohemian crowd that does n't ask questions."

"Not all of them; take Miss Wildwood, for instance. But it's an interesting lot to study. Max Bebel, that little cad Robinson, the Blomfields, those pretty girls in the third floor back, and Miss St. David."

Ted dumped the dishes into a tray and carried them into the kitchenette.

"Now to work!" he exclaimed, lighting his pipe and

sitting down at his end of the table beyond the little curtain; "get busy!"

"Work!" cried Peter, "work! On the first morning after I've had my first book accepted, with the sun shining like this and the Avenue only a step away! Not on your tintype!" And he seized his hat and stick. "Come along! the Park will be wonderful this afternoon!"

"What do you say to a tramp on Staten Island?"

"Not up to it to-day, I'm sorry to say, Ted. *You* go if you like. I'm just fit for a stroll to the Park, a lounge on a bench, and back again."

"All right," said Ted. And seizing his hat in a moment they were on the Avenue in step with the usual Sunday morning procession made up of grocers' clerks, shopgirls, German delicatessen merchants, barbers, and about every young man in general of the inferior classes who could, by affluence, credit, or guile, buy, borrow, or beg a silk hat and a pair of patent-leather boots.

All of these swarms were blissfully sure that they were doing the proper and fashionable thing by taking part in the church parade, but the really smart people, of course, knew better and would n't have thought of showing themselves for fear that somebody might think that they could n't really be so *very* smart after all. Edith Richmond had to take this chance, however, as she walked on the Avenue from Fifty-fifth west to Fifty-fourth east, and during this short distance she saw Vera and Uncle John — they did n't see her —

walking, Vera with a tall, thin young man with a high nose, and Uncle John with another young man rotund and pleasant. Edith thought Vera's young man rather nice-looking and wondered where she'd picked him up. The other did n't interest her. Five seconds later she met Fred Filbert and gave him the most soul-stirring bow he had ever had in his life. Fred had happened to overhear a covert joke about his sombrero the day before at his club and had instantly made for the nearest hatter's, where he had discovered that he looked very well in a top hat. He had purchased one and now wore it, producing, together with other necessary harmonious garments, an *ensemble* which Edith's quick eye perceived was good enough. She would send him a card to-morrow — that night in fact; the thought of the sombrero had made her waver, the top hat solidified her determination.

Peter and Ted had happened to overtake Vera and her father and had joined them. It was a day brilliant as only New York's atmosphere can be, and all these human beetles crawling on the Avenue, the lively young men, the delicatessen merchants, the little, vivacious shopgirls, the inhabitants of the boarding-houses from Madison Square to the Park, the commercial salesmen, the barbers, and the eager sojourners from other cities, burnished by the rays of the incomparable sun, furnished a kind of enlivening tinsel glitter.

"A crowd lifts me up," said Vera to Peter as they walked along.

"It is the stimulant given off by all these vitalities around us. If we could only bottle it, and take it by the tablespoonful after meals."

"What an unpleasant idea."

"Well, we're taking it now — by absorption."

"I have vitality enough of my own, thank you. I wonder if I have enough to write a book! I would rather do that than anything!"

"But last night you wanted to learn to dance like the Blomfields."

"I want to do both," answered Vera, "and ever so many things beside. Do you know what I would do if I were very rich and had a son? I would make him the most accomplished creature ever seen. Just think how many waking hours there are in every day and how much could be done with them if every one of them was utilized. Every hour he would be learning something. With all that time to work with, I would make a musician of him, an artist, a singer, a linguist, a scientist, an athlete."

"Poor little chap. You would never give him time in which to be a boy!"

"Yes, I would; there would be an hour for that, too!"

Peter laughed. "But you are young; try it on yourself first just to see how it would work."

"But I am poor. The first requirement is money so that all your time could be devoted to self-improvement."

"With so much learning you would have to keep one

hour a day, I'm afraid, which would be devoted to the task of keeping yourself from becoming a blue-stockings."

"What a funny, old-fashioned expression. There are n't such things as blue-stockings nowadays!"

"They have another name!"

"What name? Be careful what you say!"

"Now you are threatening me!"

"No, I am only warning you that I am *very* advanced, so that you might not be rude without meaning to be."

"I don't mind women being advanced, but they need n't be blue-stockings," said Peter; "and, anyway, I think you would make a failure of your experiment. The thing is to do one thing better than almost anybody else if you can, and that means concentration. Millicent Blomfield thinks it is a great thing to be able to jump into the air, turn a somersault, and come down on a pocket handkerchief. And it is; it's a great thing to do anything better than anybody else. Much better, to my mind, than doing a lot of things only passably."

"Then I suppose that I must choose between writing a novel and learning how to dance," said Vera, capitulating smilingly; "and there is Mr. Robinson disappearing around the corner!"

"Better decide on the novel," said Peter.

He could n't exactly see her turning somersaults on a pocket handkerchief. In fact the idea was n't a pleasant one. He wondered why! Millicent did it and it seemed all right! Why not Vera? He began to compare the two. Of course Millicent was a good sort enough,

but he was sorry now that he had squeezed her hand. He had been thinking that he would take the trouble to know Millicent better, but now he thought he would n't. He looked at Vera. Life, as he had thought the night before, had left her, so far, unscathed, but he could see now, as he thought of it, that it had touched Millicent too, as well as Dora, with none too tender a hand. On Vera's tall, pliant, and erect figure no sign of any burden revealed itself; not one line or shadow marked the fresh colorings of her face; her eyes clear as agates, wide open with the frank, direct look of omnipotent youth seemed never to have known a tear. Not so Millicent! *She* must have fought her way in a none too friendly world where doubt was in the air and suspicion the only policy with which to treat one's neighbors! Tears *she* had known, struggles too; meannesses; and the base selfishnesses of man!

Why must this be so? The one shielded — because it was plain that she had been shielded — and the other turned out to the inclement buffetings of life? And why should those very misfortunes against which Millicent had struggled count against her? Why not in her favor? Why should this secure, complacent, untouched, ignorant child of good fortune take precedence of her, as she always would? Was there not here a duty for him — Peter — to perform? Must not the writer's conduct as well as the power of the writer's pen work for justice and for the realization of the finest aspirations of the soul? —

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed suddenly, startled out of his reverie.

Vera was explaining that they, she and her father, were going into the Park to sit down for a while, it was so mild. Peter and Ted went with them. After they had strolled about, sat on benches, and strolled about again for an hour or more, Uncle John announced that their programme now called for luncheon in a small table d'hôte restaurant in the upper fifties on the West Side. Would they care to go too? Peter and Ted accepted gratefully, understanding, of course, that they were expected to pay their share.

They crossed Fifty-ninth Street and entered Sixth Avenue. The shops were closed, with the exception of a corner drug-store where young men could be seen treating their girls to soda water. Children scampered here and there diagonally across the empty street, a languid shuttle train clanked overhead into the Elevated station, and people emerged from or disappeared momentarily into the doorways giving access to flats above the shops.

They turned west, and presently, Uncle John leading the way, descended by three steps into a small basement restaurant, passed through it and a kitchen hung with copper saucepans; where the proprietress, a handsome, dark, stout Italian woman, stood before the fire; out into the back yard where a few tables were placed under an awning and screened from the rear windows of the neighboring houses and the observation of neigh-

boring cats by wooden trellises painted green, up which a few tired creepers were trying to climb.

In this yard the husband of the proprietress, the waiter of the establishment, was administering to the wants of a single customer. A youngish man with a wide, low forehead, indomitable eyes, and a Napoleonic cast of countenance. A black bag rested on a chair beside him. The day was mild and the warm somnolence of a Sunday afternoon pervaded the little enclosure. They drew out their chairs with a clatter and sat down.

"What I was going to say," said Uncle John to Ted, "was that it is really astonishing and disheartening, too, when one thinks how little impression all our stores of literature and learning make on the mass of mankind. Indeed, it makes none anywhere except on an infinitesimal class of exceptionally thoughtful people —"

"Papa!" interrupted Vera, "Emmanuel wants to know whether you will have the regular luncheon or some 'fritto misto' which is an extra special to-day."

"Fritto misto, of course, and also, seeing it's Sunday, a bottle of Montepulciano extra special, too! — In fact, a single catchpenny phrase —"

"Is that all, father?"

"Café noir afterwards and the biggest, blackest cigar Emmanuel can find in the shop!"

Uncle John, looking like a mild edition of Bernard Shaw, was evidently preparing to enjoy himself, by the discussion of about any topic which might arise.

"In fact, a single catchpenny phrase may and often

does, because it pleases the humor or fancy of the people, shape the opinions of a whole nation even if it be absolutely unable to stand the test of serious analysis!"

"Do you really think so!" exclaimed Peter.

"Therefore," continued Uncle John, "you young men who have embraced the profession of letters must not be disheartened if you find how little impression you will be able to make on the thought — or lack of thought — of your time!"

"That's a chunk of solid wisdom, Peter," said Ted.

"Yes, I suppose it is," assented Peter; "but that must not affect our attitude toward things, do you think, sir?"

"Not at all, not at all!" answered Uncle John. "Lift your banners as high as may be, but don't be disappointed if nobody sees them."

"Father, you're too discouraging!" interposed Vera. "I have been thinking of writing a book myself, and now I don't believe I shall."

"Why? Would you refuse to write unless you were certain of immediate awards? If that is the case, take our friend Filbert as a model."

"I don't believe your daughter could write like that, sir," said Peter.

"We have no reason to suppose that she can write at all." And Uncle John squeezed Vera's hand.

At the mention of Fred's name the youngish man with the Napoleonic cast of features had turned and looked fixedly at their table.

"That, of course, is always the question," remarked

Ted. "Whether one shall write to suit the popular taste or one's own!"

"Excuse me," answered Uncle John. "I believe that people always do write their own way and can't write in any other! You hear of writers who are prostituting their profession for gain, the inference being that they have concealed about them, somewhere, superior talents which they refuse to use because they are not profitable. Don't believe such nonsense! A man reveals himself in all he does; he can't help it; and if he has fine qualities as a writer they are bound to show. If they don't show, he has n't got them!"

"What do you think about Fred Filbert, sir?" asked Peter.

"Fred Filbert's writings are Fred Filbert, just as Meredith's writings are Meredith, or Thackeray's, Thackeray! That's all there is to it. If something about Filbert's soul, or that part of it which goes into his book, appeals to the public, he will be read. Fred Filbert is a type; uneducated, shallow, boisterous, energetic, and thick-skinned; there are thousands like him, and they understand that part of himself which he reveals in his books, therefore they read them! Thackeray's soul they would not comprehend, but they comprehend Filbert's. Complicated thoughts or emotions abash them, and they are only comfortable when dealing with obvious and primitive things!"

"Then I am safe after all," exclaimed Vera. "I'm sure that my book will not be at all complicated."

"Are you really thinking of writing one, Miss Wildwood?" asked Ted.

"She is thinking of writing one to-day," answered Uncle John; "to-morrow she will have decided to do something else. She is like one of those curious fire-works which with a tremendous fizzing and sputtering darts this way and that, and then all at once sinks to the ground, with nothing left but a dull, red glow, looking at you out of the darkness like a baleful eye."

"Well, really, father!" cried Vera. But they all laughed at this comparison, Uncle John more heartily than anybody, and even the resolute features of the youngish man at the adjoining table relaxed pleasantly, and, turning to Uncle John he said with an attractive kind of old-fashioned courtesy, speaking with a voice and accent unmistakably Southern:

"Excuse me, sir, I have been unable to avoid listening to your interesting discourse and a moment ago overheard the name of Mr. Filbert. Can you tell me where he lives, sir?"

There was something about the forceful and down-right air of the stranger which acted as an immediate guarantee.

"Certainly, sir, of course I can — he lives at —" answered Uncle John, and stopped suddenly; "no, he does n't either! Where *does* he live?" He looked about him, but no one could give an answer.

"I was going to say," explained Uncle John, "that

he lived at the same address we do in forty blank street, but he has just moved out."

"When I telephoned him this morning I was told that he had moved away. There were apparently new tenants in his flat, and not wishing to annoy them I made no further inquiries!"

"He had already been gone forty-eight hours at that time, sir," answered Uncle John. Something like a shadow crossed the stranger's face. "I could easily get his address for you, sir."

"It is of no consequence, sir," the stranger responded, and, as he had settled his bill, he picked up his black bag and his hat and, bowing politely, disappeared.

"A doctor," remarked Peter.

"A bill collector, I should say!" observed Ted.

"Mr. Filbert might not thank you for offering to get his address, father!"

"True," said Uncle John. "I had n't thought of that! But if one's conscience is clear, why should one mind meeting anybody?"

"Oh, very well, then, I'll send out invitations tomorrow for a family party," answered Vera; whereupon Uncle John shivered and lifted his hands with a gesture of supplication.

Luncheon was finished and the men began to smoke over their coffee.

"How mean it was of us not to ask Dora St. David to come with us, father!" exclaimed Vera presently.

"Why mean?" asked Uncle John.

"Because she's lonely."

"Lonely! She's never alone!"

"Nevertheless she's lonely!"

"Very well! Ask her now!"

"After we've finished luncheon?"

"We'll have Emmanuel make something special. A macedoine! And have it ready by the time she gets here!"

"That's a good idea! I'll telephone!" And Vera jumped up. Presently she returned. Rose had answered the telephone. Miss St. David was ill, and was lying down. "I'll stop and see her when we get home," said Vera.

Uncle John paid the bill, Ted and Peter each contributing his share, and they got up and walked east, finally turning down the Avenue. At their street Peter left them to leave his card and his letter of introduction on Mrs. Richmond, while Vera stopped at Dora's and rang. Rose opened the door. She exhibited — in contrast to her usual smiling countenance — an expression of almost angry perturbation, and with a gesture cautioning silence, led the way into the kitchen and closed the door.

"How is Miss St. David, Rose?" Vera asked at once.

"She's got one of her headaches, Mis' Vera," Rose answered. "She's so sick!"

"Can't I do something for her?"

"No'm. She won't let anybody do anything. She jes' goes to bed an' stays there till she's better."

"Does n't she have a doctor?"

"Huh! They ain't no doctor that can help Mis' Dora!"

"Why not, Rose?"

"Because she's frettin' over somethin' we don't none of us know anything about, pore chile, that's what's the matter! Somebody called up on the telephone this mawnin' an' she spoke to them, and after that, she went to bed. She looked frightened to *me*! It was Mistah Filbert, I reckon!" Rose hesitated, and then added with a sudden vindictive outburst, "If dat Mistah Filbert doan' keep 'way from yer, I'll sholey slip a knife into 'him some day!"

"Rose!" cried Vera. "What do you mean?"

"He ain't got no business yere, foolin' roun' dat pore chile! He ought to be in jail, he ought! It ain't no fault of his that Mis' Dora ain't in her grave!"

"But I don't understand! What do you mean?" cried Vera again.

"Listen, Mis' Vera. Sid an' I have been worryin' an' worryin' about it for so long that at las' Sid said I should tell you. It was las' summer. I used to sleep out then, an' at night Mis' Dora was yer all alone. Well, one evenin' Mis' Dora an' Mistah Filbert went out together an' Sid heard 'em come in about midnight, jest as he was going to bed. It was a warm night an' Sid had the door of his room open, an' along about three o'clock, he heard Mistah Filbert at Mis' Dora's door, callin' to her. She did n't answer an' he went back to

his room. Pretty soon he came runnin' downstairs, opened the front door, an' a man came in. Sid looked out an' saw it was a doctor that lives up the street. In about ten minutes a taxi stopped an' a woman got out. Sid was scared, but he knew the doctor by sight, so he thought it mus' be all right. When I come nex' mornin' the nurse was yer! She said Mis' Dora was took sick with peritonitis in the night — but the look on that pore chile's face was enough to hant you, Mis' Vera! *She* did n't have no peritonitis!"

"But what was it, Rose?" exclaimed Vera. "What had happened?"

"Listen, Mis' Vera! When Mis' Dora went out with Mistah Filbert that night, she had on a pretty, light muslin dress. I found it in her closet afterwards with the waist all tore to shreds!" Rose clenched her fists. "What had he been doin' to her? He was rough with her! I know it! They say she had peritonitis. *I* know better!"

Vera was trembling.

"But what was it, Rose? How do you know it was n't?"

"Because there was a smell in that room I'd smelt befo', Mis' Vera! They could n't get rid of it! It was the smell of poison!"

"Oh!" cried Vera, putting her hands to her eyes as if to shut out some frightful vision, "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

A flood of mingled emotions swept over her. Nausea; fear; pity; repulsion; sympathy, and horror. She seemed

to be breathing an atmosphere heavy with sinister apprehensions, a faintness enveloped her, and presently she woke to the realization that Rose was bathing her face with water, and that she was sitting on one of the kitchen chairs, and leaning back against the sill of an open window.

CHAPTER XVII

VERA had arranged with Uncle George a plan by which Uncle John could be employed by the firm of Richmond Sons & Richmond without his address or identity being revealed to Charles. Uncle George recommended a certain Mr. W. Wood, living in retirement at the Kilkenny, as a reader. Uncle George's recommendations were never ignored, and manuscripts were sent regularly by Richmond Sons & Richmond, said manuscripts being received and delivered by Sid, who had been, to an extent, let into the secret. These manuscripts were received by Vera, and especially by Uncle John, with immense pride and satisfaction. One might have imagined from the heavy importance of Uncle John's manner, as he settled himself after breakfast each morning with a mass of typewritten sheets in his hand, that he was no less a person than the Secretary of State engaged in the inspection of portentous national papers. He read them so painstakingly at first and made such elaborate reports on them — typed by Vera at night — that he nearly lost his job, Charles complaining to Uncle George that his new reader was too long-winded for any use; but as the novelty of the occupation faded, he began to acquire habits of brevity which, with a really fresh and untiring taste for fiction, made his anonymous voice of some weight in Charles's decisions.

The only trouble with Uncle John was that he was too particular. He had no patience with nor liking for the army of Swallows and Filberts who were industriously catering to the most superficial and childish preferences of a public already superficial and childish enough. Uncle John was, of course — not being a practical man — a failure, but he was endowed with a fastidious taste, and most of the books given him to read riled his soul by the cheapness of their point of view and the narrow ignorance the writers betrayed of their own mental horizons.

Uncle John counselled the rejection of so many of them that his advice was not always followed, but when he did recommend one, the firm grew to feel that they must not reject it without serious consideration, and it was partly due to him that Fred's third variation on the "Dictionary Dan" theme had been rejected — fair credit, of course, being given to the junior shipping clerk.

"I'm nothing but an old fool," exclaimed Uncle John one evening, as with a flushed face he hurled a handful of manuscript into the air.

"Why, *father!*" answered Vera composedly; "that's strong language for *you* to use!"

"But these young men should n't be writers!" cried Uncle John irritably. "Nature never intended them to be writers! They should be professional baseball players, pugilists, policemen, politicians, or even postmen, but not writers. Why should I be condemned to read such stuff? I'm going to write a novel myself!"

"No, father, dear!" answered Vera firmly. "The Kilkenny has enough of them already — counting Fred Filbert —"

"You can't count him! He is n't here any more!" interjected Uncle John.

"Well, he used to be. And Mr. Watergate — and myself —"

"Yourself!" cried Uncle John ribaldly. "You have n't put pen to paper yet."

"Have n't I?"

"Well, have you?"

"I shan't tell. I shan't let you know anything about it until it is finished and printed and on sale at all the bookshops."

"Well, that leaves Mr. Watergate as the only one," insisted Uncle John.

"Are n't you horrid!"

"And possibly me, if I conclude to show them how a novel should be written!"

Vera knew that this was only talk. While her father, she felt sure, knew how a novel ought to be written, she felt equally sure that he did n't know how to write one.

But they had great fun with the manuscripts Richmond Sons & Richmond sent Uncle John.

The very next afternoon after the Sunday when they had lunched with Peter and Ted, Vera, happening to glance out of the window a few minutes after getting home from business, saw a small town car drawing up to the curb.

"Here comes Edith!" she announced.

Uncle John in a panic ran to the window in time to see Edith getting out of it, and with exclamations of alarm rushed into his bedroom and tightly shut the door. He was heartily afraid of her.

Edith came in somewhat out of breath, sat down, and inquired before she had recovered it: "Who was that nice-looking young man I saw you on the street with yesterday?"

"Mr. Peter Watergate!" answered Vera.

She said this with satisfaction, intending, when Edith asked for further particulars, to arouse her curiosity by not giving them. But Edith surprised and disappointed her by dropping the subject. Vera did n't know that Peter had left a letter of introduction on Edith the day before and that Edith instantly remembered the name when Vera mentioned it. Edith, therefore, wanted to know no more about Mr. Watergate from Vera and she proceeded with the main object of her visit.

"I must say, Vera, I don't think you have been displaying an especially friendly spirit — going off the way you did without a word to any one!"

"We were tired of family quarrels and — well, yes, of the family, too," answered Vera — "I may as well say it — and wanted a rest."

"It would have been simple enough to have given us to understand *that*, it seems to me," retorted Edith. "We are not in the habit of pushing ourselves in where we're not wanted!"

As Edith was at that moment occupying a considerable portion of Vera's sitting-room, Vera found it hard not to smile.

"How is grandfather?" asked Edith.

"Grandfather!" repeated Vera in astonishment. "How should I know?"

"I naturally supposed that he would be spending most of his time with his favorite grandchild," said Edith. "*I* never see him."

"I don't either," answered Vera.

"You *don't*? Vera Wildwood, do you know what you are? You're a wicked little liar!"

"He's never been here since we moved in!" asserted Vera.

"Well, then, you meet him somewhere else, and, anyway, I don't believe you."

"It's true," insisted Vera.

Edith jumped up. "I suppose he makes you a present of this, does n't he?" And before Vera could stop her she was in the next room which happened to be Uncle John's. Uncle John had just had time to whisk out and had taken refuge in Vera's bedroom.

"Phew! Tobacco! This is your father's bedroom. I want to see yours. Where is it? There?" And hurrying across the sitting-room she opened the door. Uncle John had just succeeded in vanishing into the dining-room.

"How you could ever have given us up for this tenement is more than I can understand," remarked Edith, in genuine astonishment. "What's this?" And she

opened the dining-room door just as Uncle John shut himself into the kitchenette.

"Stuffy little hole! *I* know what you're up to, Vera! Don't suppose you have such a thing as a bathroom." And pulling open the door to the kitchenette she disclosed Uncle John standing in the middle of the floor looking very foolish.

"Undignified and silly!" remarked Edith, and, shutting him into the kitchenette again she said good-bye to Vera and went away.

The next afternoon Tim turned up. Vera understood at once that his visit was unconsciously the result of suggestion on Edith's part and, as luck would have it, just as he was leaving, in came Grandfather Penfield. This *was* his first visit to them, but Vera knew that Tim's report of it would confirm Edith's belief that he spent most of his time with the designing Vera, who had moved away the more easily to get him into her clutches.

Tim came in with his plastered hair and red, good-natured face, and sat down with a matter-of-fact air as if he'd been there twenty times before.

"Morning, Vera; don't you want a game of golf to-morrow afternoon? Oh, come along!"

"I can't, Tim. I'm a working-woman now!"

"Rot. Besides, Uncle John's making money now! I say, how much do they pay him for reading for our firm?"

"Tim! You mean thing!" cried Vera. "Does Charles know?"

"I don't know! Charles can't see anything unless it's under his nose!"

"Well, how did *you* know?"

"Say, Vera, every one at home seems to think I'm a silly ass, but I don't think Uncle George does. **Know** what he did the other day? Raised my pay to six dollars a week, with expenses and a percentage! I was getting three before."

"How did you manage it?"

"Struck him for it! I said, 'Say, Uncle George, I'm going to resign Saturday!' 'All right,' he said. 'I'm satisfied; you're no earthly use here! What are you going to resign for?' 'If I can't do anything better than address envelopes, I'd rather spend my time enjoying myself,' I said. 'Well, what do you want to do?' 'Any kind of a decent job.' 'Ever read any of our publications, Tim?' he asked. 'Never have,' I said. 'Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. Here's our spring line of fiction, run through it, and I'll put you on as an assistant salesman for the Metropolitan district at six dollars a week and a commission of five per cent. I'll give you a month's trial.' 'Right-o,' I said. 'Here, take this batch and read 'em through so you'll know what you're talking about!' But, Lord, Vera, I could n't read 'em!" Here Tim lowered his voice confidentially, "Say, Vera, what on earth do people write books for? Of all the d— I beg your pardon, foolishness. Of course, if people *will* read books — and I don't know what they want to for — the game is to publish 'em, not to write 'em. Every

once in a while you see an article in the papers about the wads novel-writers make — know what *I* think? *I* think the publishers, people like Uncle George, get that stuff put in just to encourage people to write. Once in a while some one may make big money, but none of the people who come around to our place look like it! Always on their uppers. Worse than actors a good deal!"

"Have you started on your new work, Tim?" asked Vera.

"Yes, and done pretty well," answered Tim.

"But if you have n't read the books — " began Vera.

"How can I sell 'em? I'll tell you. You see, Uncle George called in the head salesman to give me a few talks about selling books. He's supposed to be a crack-a-jack. But after the first half-hour I said, 'Uncle George, this is too deep for me; let me try my own way!' The head salesman was spouting about literature, psycho-something analysis, humor, and a lot of stuff like that. I saw I could n't give anybody that line of talk, so I tried another tack. I looked at the ending of each book, at the pictures, and to see how closely it was printed. Then I'd go in and tackle the manager of a store. 'Well, here's our line,' I'd say. 'Here's a story that's almost all snappy dialogue! Here's one full of description — sentimental stuff, you know, but with a happy ending — and here's a quick-fire detective story! All with good pictures and up-to-date covers. How many can I book for you?' — And I did pretty well — but, Vera, they're all behind the times!"

"Who?" asked Vera.

"The publishers! Do you know what I'd do if I had my say? I'd give away things with each book — shaving-soap — pocket mirrors, or something like that! Then people'd be getting *something* for their money, at any rate!"

"Look here, Tim. Have you ever read a book in your life?"

"Some of Henty when I was a boy, but I've out-grown all that."

"You're a dreadful young barbarian!"

"What's the good of reading books? Nobody I know ever reads 'em."

"You said a true word that time, Tim. They never do."

"I say, Vera, do come along and have a game of golf to-morrow. No? Well, I must be going. Which floor do the Blomfield sisters live on? Thought I'd make 'em a call."

"Did they ask you to call, Tim?"

"One of 'em did. Forget which."

"I'm cross with you, Tim!"

Tim laughed.

"Have you been to call on Miss St. David?" asked Vera.

"No. What for?"

"Did n't you go to her party? Drink her whiskey? Smoke her cigarettes and dance with her guests?"

"Well, I know," answered Tim, "but — but —"

"You mean you won't bother to be polite to her because she's of no particular importance! That's what you mean! Well, what are you going to call on the Blomfields for, then?"

Tim, looking uncomfortable, got up. His face was, if possible, redder than it had been before. "Well, good-bye, Vera!" He made for the door, and, opening it, almost knocked down Mr. Penfield who was coming in from the other side.

"He's the smartest one of the family!" remarked Mr. Penfield after Tim had disappeared.

"He is n't; he's hateful and horrid! Every one is almost, grandfather. The older I get the less trust I have in anybody!"

Mr. Penfield was moving about restlessly as his habit was. "What's he been doing?" he asked. "Anything bad?"

"Not that I know of, but people are so despicable sometimes. So selfish. So callous about their own kind!"

"I don't think so, Vera. Don't expect them to be perfect, though."

"Sometimes I think that perhaps it is living in cities that makes people vile and that I'd like to live my whole life in the country. What do you think, grandfather?"

"They're about the same everywhere, Vera," answered the old man. "Of course it was different in my day — then, if people wanted to amount to anything, they had to work. Everybody nowadays seems to want

to get something for nothing, want to pretend they're something without taking the trouble to really be what they want people to think they are."

Mr. Penfield stopped as if surprised at himself for having emitted so long and involved a sentence, and sat down.

"But has Tim been doing anything bad?" he repeated.

"No, but he will grow up to be a hateful young man. Just see if he does n't. How can he help it when no one is ever taught to have ideals, to feel that there are noble things in life to do, and unselfish things, and that people ought to have some other aim than getting hold of more of everything than they really need, and spending their lives over their silly ambitions the way Edith does, when there's so much that's really worth while waiting to be done in the world?"

Mr. Penfield, looking quite worried, remarked: "Your father is n't turning socialist, is he, Vera?"

"No, but I am," answered Vera; "in this way, that I believe that the theory that the weak must go to the wall because they are weak and that there's no help for it is an abominable theory, and people believe in it simply to salve their own consciences. Don't you believe that we worship false gods?"

"Yes, I'm with you there, Vera," answered her grandfather. "That's what I just said."

"And are n't there any true ones? Of course there are, grandfather, only to serve them is n't easy, so

people won't do it. This is a queer topsy-turvy, hard-hearted world, grandfather!"

Vera was red-eyed and tired. During the whole night she had tossed on her bed, going over and over in her thoughts the story Rose had told her the afternoon before. Without warning the realization of the full horror of suicide had struck upon her intelligence knocking her into the depths of an unimagined abyss. The sudden knowledge that life, that enchanting vista, could become for any one an undesirable thing, a nightmare, perhaps, something insupportable, had overwhelmed her and the whole impulse of her nature had gone out in a yearning effort to hit upon some way to help Dora out of her difficulties, whatever they might be.

"What's gone wrong, Vera?" her grandfather asked.

"I was thinking of a woman I heard of last night, grandfather, and comparing her with Edith. I don't know anything about her, but I'll swear she's a better woman than Edith, and yet, because she's simpler or less selfish or something, she's being pushed slowly down while Edith is making of her life just what she wants to make of it. She's what is called a success, the other's a failure."

"Perhaps Edith is the failure and the other the success, Vera. I suppose it's the point of view."

"I've no patience with the 'be good and you'll be happy' point of view, grandfather! I'm surprised at you!"

Grandfather Penfield had looked surprised, too, after

he had given vent to this moral reflection, and now he attempted to retrieve the situation by saying, "Well, I always feel, when people make a failure of life, that it's their own fault."

"How do you mean it's their own fault?" She glanced at him challengingly and saw that he was looking at her reflectively under his wrinkled lids, and suddenly she understood that these were questions which each — she, her grandfather, Dora, the Blomfields — must answer for themselves.

"Poor grandfather," she said, smiling, "you can't please me to-day; I'm out of sorts with everything. How's Auntie?"

"That's what I came about," answered Grandfather Penfield. "She's very feeble."

"I should have been to see her!" exclaimed Vera. "It's very selfish of me!"

"She does n't recognize people sometimes now! She worries about Phil too much! If this Phil should die it might have a bad effect on her! Mary feeds him now while Auntie's at her meals!"

"Does the doctor see her?"

"Oh, yes. He says it's just old age, and that she can't last much longer. I was thinking, Vera, I've got a couple of little houses uptown that are going to be vacant in the spring. If Auntie should n't be here, then would you and your father like to move into one with me? I would let Charles have the other."

Vera hesitated. She liked the freedom which her new

life gave her and would be loath to abandon it. Mr. Penfield got up.

"Well, think it over," he remarked; "there's plenty of time!"

Vera made a quick movement toward him. "Of course we'll come, grandfather, any time; and thank you for asking us. I'll come and see Auntie this afternoon."

"Well, take your time," repeated Mr. Penfield; "there's no hurry!" And he began to feel his way cautiously down the stairs.

Vera went down with him as far as Dora's flat, bade him good-bye, and rang the bell. Dora was up and was sitting by a window in her parlor. She was as carefully dressed as usual and said that she was quite herself again, which Vera hardly believed. She greeted Vera with a genuine smile of welcome. Since she had come to know the Wildwoods and Peter and Ted, she had begun to feel that she was among her own people once more under conditions which need not arouse apprehensions of discovery and she was glad.

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Vera in her downright way, "you look as if you'd had a bad time."

For an instant Vera thought that Dora's lip had trembled, but the next was sure that she had been mistaken. Dora smiled.

"Have you ever had a headache, Vera?"

"Never in my life," answered Vera.

"Some people are never able to get rid of them."

"Rose was telling me that you have them often. Have you been having them for long?"

"Four years ago they began to come. But I'm very strong, and when they are over I am as well as ever."

"But what causes them? Can't the doctors tell?"

"Something will happen and I will have one of my headaches. The thing which has happened has caused it, but *why* it has caused it the doctors can't tell, nor I, although I have my theory about it." She paused. "Have you ever seen a dead person, Vera?"

"No," answered Vera with a slight shiver. "My mother died when I was too young to remember."

"I remember what my father looked like then and my mother too. Each looked to me utterly tired, as if the very act of living, the very action on them of life itself, had worn them out. Do you know what life seems like to me?" Dora went on. "It seems like the sea and a strong young swimmer swimming in it. He laughs and plunges ahead. The blue waves roll, the fresh wind blows the foam, and the sun sparkles on the water. He rides over the waves or dives through them, shakes the drops from his hair, laughs again and floats idly; he seems strong to himself, tireless and unconquerable, but presently he begins to feel that the waves are more tireless than he. He must continually fight them or they will overwhelm him, he can't stop, can't rest! The sun still shines, the waves still sparkle, but mercilessly they roll on and on. The swimmer still struggles, but he is n't laughing now! Presently a wave rolls over him.

He comes up again, still swimming bravely, but he is tired. His head aches — just as mine does — and the muscles of his arms and legs are stiff and weary. Another wave covers him. He comes up once more, only this time more slowly. Another breaks, he is rolled over by it. For a moment you see his face, it is strange and pale, his eyes are closed. He raises one arm, but a smother of blue water buries him and he is gone. The sea is life, the swimmer you, I, and all of us! It tires us out!”

“No, I will not have it like that!” answered Vera. “Life to me is a pretty boat in which I am sailing safely over this selfsame sea! The waves may roll and roll, but I don’t care. All the more merrily my little boat dances over them! They bear me where I want to go, the wind fills my sails, the sun warms me, and presently I am lifting your reckless swimmer in with me out of the cold and wet into my cosy cabin!”

Dora looked at her with her dark eyes.

“You are brave,” she said. “I hate cowards, but sometimes I think that I am one myself.”

“No, you’re not. Any one could see that. You’re depressed. I think you’re alone too much!”

“I try not to be!”

“By always having somebody about no matter who it is! I never felt so lonely as when I was living at grandfather’s in a big house full of people, and now that father and I are alone together I’m not lonely at all. That sounds strange, does n’t it? But it must mean

that loneliness comes not necessarily from lack of companionship, but from lack of the right kind. Come up and dine with us to-night. We have a little maid who comes in every day. Will you? I was wondering if we could get hold of Mr. Filbert. I'll telephone him if you will give me his number." Vera had taken it for granted that it was Filbert's voice which had disturbed Dora on the telephone the morning before and wanted to find out. "If you have his number I will call him up." She hesitated to say this, fearing that she might be turning a knife in a wound already throbbing, but something impelled her to.

To her surprise Dora showed no perturbation, answering naturally: "I don't know his number; he was to telephone me yesterday and I meant to ask him it then, but he did n't call up."

The voice then, which had disturbed her had not been Filbert's. Rose had been wrong.

Dora accepted her invitation to dine and Vera went upstairs. Her father was not at home and she sat alone in the sitting-room. Dora's pale face rose before her, and the thought of the tragic act Rose had told her of. Could Rose have been mistaken? Something told her that she had not been, and yet the repulsion she had feared Dora would rouse in her she had not felt. Rather pity.

What could be done for her? Something must be. Dora seemed to her like a strong nature determined to keep her difficulties to herself. This was brave and ad-

mirable, but it would shut out help for her if help was to be found. But perhaps she had been at fault. Well, must not people who have been at fault be helped as well as the others? Vera somehow had faith in Dora St. David. She seemed to her a victim rather than a transgressor, and strong in the faith of this intuition she resolved to help her if she could — even to learn if she could, facts which Dora herself might not divulge.

Suddenly, through a subconscious process of mental recurrence, she was back in the little restaurant with her father, Mr. Watergate, and Mr. Blakie. A man with a broad, low forehead and a Napoleonic cast of countenance is speaking, and she hears him telling her father that he had called up Filbert's flat that morning! Could his have been the voice which had so disturbed Dora? If Rose had not answered the telephone that morning herself, and if it had rung only once, then it *must* have been! This could be easily verified, and, ringing for Sid, she asked him to ask Rose to come upstairs for a moment when opportunity offered. Rose came up immediately. The telephone she said had rung but once and had been answered by Miss St. David. It *was*, then, the stranger's voice!

This discovery seemed to indicate that she was on the track of something, and again a recollection of their Sunday's luncheon came to her assistance. She remembered the stranger's small black bag, and Peter's hazard that he was a doctor. She sent for Sid again, and de-

scribed him. Broad forehead, piercing dark eyes, a bold nose, and handsome mouth.

"Yaas'm," responded Sid. "That's sure him! That's the doctor that came that night!"

"What's his name, Sid?"

"Dr. Marsham, Mis' Vera!"

"You say he lives near Sixth Avenue?"

"Yaas'm."

"But we must make sure! How can we see him together?"

"Well, his sign says, 'Office hours, ten to twelve,' so I reckon he goes out every day 'bout noon. We might wait across the street foh him!"

They waited the next day, and at quarter-past twelve the doctor appeared and walked rapidly toward Sixth Avenue. "There he is!" exclaimed Sid, and Vera saw the man she had been expecting to. She was triumphant. At last she *was* getting on the track of something, but after a day or two, when, unable to resist the temptation to test Dora with her discovery, she managed somehow to mention the doctor's name, Dora heard it and let it pass with absolute unrecognition. There was no pretence about it. It was evident that she had never heard it.

CHAPTER XVIII

DORA dined that night with Vera and Uncle John. The three had taken their time at table discussing anything that happened to come into their heads, and afterwards did practically the same thing in the sitting-room. Vera and her father possessed a pleasant form of intellectual curiosity which caused any topic to be immediately welcomed by them, examined closely, turned upside down, and peered into — as a child examines a newly arrived package — until another presented itself, when it in turn was welcomed with the same particularity. Or like a brightly and variously colored ball, they held it in their hands, examined it absorbedly, tossed it to and fro, until it was seen that that particular ball had vanished and that another was passing between them. Dora was surprised afterwards to find that in spite of the fact that no one had thought of telephoning for a taxi, that no tango parlor, theatre, or cabaret had been suggested, she had really enjoyed herself and was wishing to be asked soon again, and she was. Peter and Ted, too, began to frequent Vera's parlor, and sometimes Dora would be discussed. She had aroused their curiosity as she had other people's. Vera felt that there was something there which must be found out and she intended to discover what it was, convinced that such a discovery would work to Dora's welfare. In the meantime she saw as much of her as she could manage.

A period of calm now ensued at the Kilkenny. Sid Smallshaw had never known, during his incumbency there, a time when the tenants were so permanent. Before, express wagons were always at the door fetching in or fetching out meagre assortments of household possessions. Box couches, patent rockers, bureaux, and trunks were always being carried up or down and taking bits of plaster out of the walls in their progress. It always seemed to Sid that more people went away than came in. He got this impression from the fact that when people came in, they simply came in and that was all there was to it, but when they went out they did so in a variety of picturesque ways and under a variety of circumstances. Sometimes they went because they had to. That is, the agent, tired of unsuccessfully trying to collect the rent, served dispossess notices on them. Sometimes, but rarely, they went because they had decided to live elsewhere, and, with everything paid up to the minute, took their departure in a dignified and humdrum way. Sometimes they took French leave, sometimes they were ejected by policemen. Every once in a while some one would rent one of the flats, furnish it on the instalment plan, stay as long as they could without paying anything to anybody, and then walk out with a dress-suit-case and never come back. When Sid noticed that a tenant never went out without taking a dress-suit-case with him, he felt sure that he was preparing for exactly such a stroke.

But for a good while now the tone of the Kilkenny

had distinctly improved, and hardly anything ever happened outside of the regular routine of apartment-house life. Miss St. David stayed on and on, as did the Wildwoods, the Blomfields, the four young ladies, Peter, Ted, Robinson, and Max. The group of nondescript young men, while changing its personnel from time to time, retained its general characteristics. Respectability, that fetish of many a darky soul, surrounded the Kilkenny and rested as a balm on Sid's; on Rose's, too. When Sid, in his light check suit, and Rose, in some discarded finery of Dora's, went out now for an evening, dignity radiated. They looked back with a sense of humiliation almost, to a certain night about a year before when they had carried off first prize at a cake-walk at the Madison Square Garden. That would n't do now! What with Mis' Dora settlin' down, the fact that Mis' Vera's gran'pa owned the building, an' the agent gettin' so particlar about the tenants, they sho had a position to keep up, which they did impressively and to their own huge delight.

Mis' Dora really did seem to be settlin' down. Three months had passed and she had n't had a party. The young men of Steve's type — Steve was the youth who had been invited to take a walk the night of the party — and the rest of the nondescript crowd who used to serve to keep Dora on the go, gradually began to thin out. Heretofore, whenever anybody turned up, even if there were no more than four, the rugs would be immediately kicked aside, furniture pushed into corners, cigarettes

lighted, the phonograph turned on, and dancing would begin. This would be kept up until dinner-time when there would be a rush to some amusement place and the evening round would begin. Dora craved this excitement. It was like whiskey to the palate of an alcoholic. But the craving had begun to grow a little less insistent.

One day, to Rose's surprise and mystification, a typewriting machine was delivered again — the one used for "Dictionary Dan" and its sequel having been returned long before — and Dora set it up in a little unused room and began to use it. Rose for a time was a good deal depressed. She was afraid, since Miss Dora was doing it on her own, that she must have lost her money and decided to become a typist. And just when the whole atmosphere of the Kilkenny was beginning to become so rarefied and elegant! It was too bad! Presently, sheets upon sheets of written manuscript began to appear as if from nowhere, almost illegible, crossed and rewritten, which Mis' Dora copied out in plain letters with the aid of the typewriting machine. What could it be? Rose glanced at it once or twice when Dora was out. She thought it seemed like a story, but reading was a laborious business with her and so she gave it up, but as Mis' Dora did n't seem to be doing it for anybody except herself she decided that it was simply a new kind of recreation and felt relieved in consequence. Every few days Dora would retire to her little room and from nine until twelve the rattle of the typewriter would be heard.

About this time, to Peter Watergate's extraordinary elation, a package arrived from his publishers. It was the galley-proofs of his novel. To see this product of his own emotions, brain, and energy set forth in the impersonal clarity of printed characters, produced a strange and delightful sensation. Ted was hardly less pleased, and they pored over it together until Peter's pride gave way to indignation at the number of stupid errors with which the galleys seemed to abound. Ted, however, pointed out that to err is human and that the galleys had been sent for the very purpose of correction and revision.

Peter, therefore, corrected and revised to his heart's content, and when he had finished he read it in Vera's sitting-room to Vera, Dora, Uncle John, Ted — who had already heard it a great many times before — and Max Bebel, the five souls most in harmony within the walls of the Kilkenny. It took seven evenings — not consecutive ones because duties or engagements for one or another of his auditors intervened — but at last he finished it.

It was a good book. A little too much fine writing in it, perhaps, but sincere and earnest. After he had read the last word there was a little silence in the room. Vera was looking at Dora, and Dora, all at once meeting her glance, returned it with her dark eyes unmoved and calm. Vera felt like getting up, she did n't know why, and putting her arms around her. She had watched her covertly during the whole reading and Dora uncon-

sciously had revealed at times how Peter's story was stirring her. Only when she surprised Vera's look she masked herself instantly and completely.

It was a story, which has been told over and over in all languages, of a woman who had been unfaithful to her husband. This particular one, with its tragic finale, had been enacted in Peter's native village in New England under his very eyes and he had written it just as it had happened.

"I congratulate you, Watergate," said Uncle John at last. "You've written a fine book. The end is extremely well done and full of real pathos. How did you get them to accept it? Publishers as a rule don't want books with unhappy endings. The fact that they've taken yours in spite of it *I* should consider a genuine compliment!"

"Can it be," said Vera, "that lives can be led like that poor woman's in the midst of a civilized community, and that the hand which might have saved her was not stretched out?"

"That, of course, is the point of my book," answered Peter; "the isolation of the individual soul, the lack of real sympathy and understanding between so many of our kind. The freezing coldness of human society! I am my brother's keeper, but I will not admit it — there's too much responsibility involved, so I go my own way and let him stumble along as best he can on his!"

"You're quite right," answered Uncle John; "the

world needs reformation. The question is, how will it be brought about?"

"Never," answered Peter, "if we don't try."

"The point is this" — said Uncle John — "Is n't it a fact that man himself is irreclaimable, and therefore that all forecasts of human improvement are only the vain imaginings of impractical and kindly dreamers?"

"That," said Peter, "I will not believe. But I had in mind not so much the economic as the moral regeneration of society, greater tolerance, understanding, and faith."

"But without the one the other impossible is," interposed Max. "The world now is divided into two classes. Those who are poor and those who are not. That is, those who labor with their hands and those who do not. Those who labor live in mean places, they are not clean, they are ignorant, diseased, and often repulsive. You would haf us love these people, but ve cannot. Give them education and the means to live decently and ve would think differently of them and they of us!"

"That is n't exactly the question my book deals with," said Peter.

"No, but you can't have one without the other. It is all part of those problems which man is always drying to solve, problems arising from his own selfishness. Do away with selfishness and all vill be easy. Our society as it is constituted, breeds criminals. To reconstruct society so that criminals would no longer be produced by it would require an altruistic effort of which man in his

present condition is incapable, therefore instead we spend millions on institutions in which we keep them safely shut away. The conditions under which your heroine lived and the forces which drove her to her end would have been impossible if society was not what it was. But custom is inflexible, prejudice blind, and the progress of the human race extremely slow, if indeed it progresses at all!"

"Why, Max!" cried Vera, "you're getting more and more pessimistic every day. What has happened? Are you in love again?"

And Max, crying "Nein! Nein!" turned crimson and rushed laughing to the piano stool where he began at once to throw about him soft coils of rhythmic sound. Max was always in love with some one or other. Invariably some one he did not know. He seemed to prefer — probably through timidity — worshipping at a distance. If from his window he chanced to notice a young lady glancing out of another one across the street, he would promptly fall in love with her, investing her immediately with all sorts of fascinations. At first he would watch her from behind his curtain, being very careful that she should not see him for fear of annoying her, but gradually growing bolder he would, with a careful assumption of unconsciousness, appear at the window engaged apparently in some absorbing occupation which required a great amount of daylight, glancing cautiously toward her at intervals to ascertain if she were looking at him. If she was, he would hastily

disappear. After a time — perhaps a week, perhaps a month — during which he had lived in that elysium reserved for lovers, he would contrive to pass her on the street when, usually, he received a fearful shock of disillusionment. Owing to his hasty glances, to the barrier of his curtain, and to the distance, he had been obliged to supplement his impressions of her by means of a fervid imagination, with the result that he was often tremendously disappointed. His discretion had been so great that she would hardly ever suspect that she was under inspection, and Max, after one good look, would banish her from his heart forever.

Max was persistently unlucky in his selections.

On one occasion he fell violently in love with the lady cashier in a near-by pastry-shop, whose magnificent torso rising above her desk delighted his eye. This affair was a superb one while it lasted.

Between the hours of nine and six she was always there — except for a short interval at noon — for Max's inspection, like a wax figure in a window. Max passed the pastry-shop on one pretext or another twenty times a day, each time glancing in quickly. After a time he mustered up courage enough to stop and simulate an interest in the contents of the window by bending his head as if looking down, while from under the edge of his hat he peered stealthily into the shop.

"There was a woman for you! Such arms! Such a bosom! Brünnhilde and Venus in one!"

One day the blow fell. While pretending to be ab-

sorbed in the contemplation of a display of pumpkin pies, the cashier was summoned for some reason to the rear of the shop. When after descending from her stool she stood upon the floor, her head was just visible above her desk, and as she moved away he saw that the magnificent torso belonged to a woman with such extremely short legs that she seemed almost a dwarf. Max fled.

Once again he fled. Having seen diagonally across the street a woman bending her dark head all day over her work he fell in love as usual, and, noticing that she went out at certain regular hours, was on hand one day, as was customary, for a closer inspection. He had seen her putting on her hat. A black one with a rose on it. Presently the hat emerged from the portals of the building in which its owner worked; under it he saw a thin, elderly face, wreathed in simpers and smiles, bearing down on him cordially. Max's blood ran cold. She had evidently been watching him from the first. He must think quickly or be lost. All at once a street-car slowed down at the corner of Sixth Avenue half a block away, and Max, suddenly whistling and signalling frantically, began to run for it as if his life depended on his catching it. The car gained headway again and disappeared, but Max did not stop running. He ran with all his might right around the corner, as if still in chase of the car, and did not stop until he was safely within the shelter of a neighboring friendly beer saloon, whence he did not emerge until after dark. Max was not lucky with his love affairs.

"What do *you* think about it, Dora?" Vera made herself ask after Max, recovering from his confusion, had left the piano stool.

"The real question," replied Dora, and everybody for some reason found themselves waiting intently for her answer, "is the question of the relations of married people with each other. All the rest of it, all that follows, depends on that. The husband in Mr. Watergate's book demanded the privileges and shirked the responsibilities of mastership."

Peter exclaimed, "You've hit it exactly."

"Just as most men do," Dora went on, "and if they demand so much they must take the risks with it whether they want to or not."

"But, Dora, you can't excuse the woman either," said Vera.

"If she had been perfectly innocent the result would have been the same," answered Dora. "Her life was impossible and there was no escape for her. In fact, I think that Mr. Watergate made a mistake in making her unfaithful to her husband. It was n't necessary, and it would have made a more truthful and a stronger book if he had n't. I know that that is what most women do in novels, but in real life they don't." She smiled and turned to Peter. "You don't mind my saying what I think?"

"Not at all," answered Peter. "I thought of it, too, after I had finished it and wanted to change it, but I finally decided to leave it as it had actually happened."

"Most men demand the privileges and shirk the responsibilities of mastership!" repeated Vera. "I believe those are true words and I am going to remember them."

Managing to get a word alone with Peter before the end of the evening, she said to him:

"I can't tell you how I have enjoyed listening to your book! It made me cry and yet it uplifted me. It is splendid!" Her eyes shone as she spoke. So did Peter's, on hearing her.

"I'm so glad," he answered, and his voice caught a little at this word of praise for his beloved child. "You make me feel like beginning another one to-night!"

Vera laughed. "Is that the way appreciation affects a writer?"

"It does me," answered Peter; "it's a tremendous stimulant."

"Then it will be quite easy for me to help you along. I really mean it. Do you remember saying to me that it was better to do one thing well than many things only passably. How could you believe anything else with such a talent as yours? You are awfully lucky. Your future lies before you, a perfectly straight road. There's no doubt about what *you* must do in the world."

Peter told Ted, when they were at home in their flat again, that he considered Miss Wildwood an unusually fine girl.

That night there came over Dora one of those fits of terrible yearning for her children which could be as-

suaged only by passionate tears and by the forgetfulness of sleep. It seemed to her as if she had no place in the world. Like the woman in Peter's novel, a door had been closed shutting her out from the companionship of her kind; but Peter's book was wrong! Society is unable, even if disposed to do so, to rectify its own injustices. She had suffered innocently, but there was no help for it. She no longer and could never again belong among her own people, people like the Wildwoods, for instance. Her place was where it had been before she had come to know them, an outcast among outcasts, foregathering with all those dubious denizens of Broadway who ask no questions and make no demands.

The Wildwoods, too, made no demands and asked no questions, but by this very attitude seemed to Dora to put an obligation on her — that of not sailing under false colors. Therefore, determining not to go there oftener than she decently could, she began to return in a measure to her old restless life.

"We have n't been seeing much of our handsome neighbor lately," observed Uncle John one afternoon. He had been out for a constitutional and had just come in for tea. "When I passed her door just now the phonograph was going and there was an unmistakable sound of dancing inside. It was like old times!"

"Poor Dora!" answered Vera. "I'm sure I know exactly why she does n't come here oftener, and why she's so restless, only I can't prove it. I wish she would tell me." And she wrote a note to Fred Filbert that

very afternoon asking him to drop in some afternoon for tea. She intended to try to find out what *he* knew.

But Fred never came.

In the course of time Peter's novel — it was called "The Prisoner" — appeared with a little flourish in the way of advertising, and Peter, convinced that fame and fortune were assured, did nothing for a month beyond hunting for reviews of it and haunting the bookshops where it was exposed for sale. Everybody at the Killenny was interested in it, especially the Wildwoods, where Peter began to spend a good deal of his time. He was delighted to find that Vera loved books, and they passed many a pleasant hour enjoying together memories of favorite ones.

Presently Peter got to work again, and in four months' time was halfway through another. During these four months he avoided his publishers. Although almost uncontrollably eager to know how "The Prisoner" was going, he had made no enquiries about it because his contract stipulated that statements should be rendered him twice a year on stipulated dates and neither of these dates had yet arrived. Being as yet unhardened by life, and believing everybody else to be so, too, he had feared that any display of curiosity on his part might ruffle the souls of his publishers and he had kept away from them. Finally, however, he went. He did so because the situation happened to supply him with the necessary courage. In the first place, the advertising which had heralded the appearance of his book had

stopped completely and he wanted to know why. Other books which had appeared at about the same time were still having their merits proclaimed, but of his not a word, not even a press notice. In the second, the first date on which a statement was due him was now so close at hand that he thought that they might not object to a discreet question or two. In the third, he had an excuse in his new book. He wanted to let them know that before long he would have another one ready for them.

Peter, therefore, called on his publishers and was admitted almost immediately into the presence of the junior member of the firm. The junior member admitted at once, with manly frankness, that Peter's book was not doing as well as they had hoped, which was the reason for the discontinuance of the advertising. Peter then called attention to a work of fiction, issued simultaneously by his publishers with "The Prisoner," which was being advertised most lavishly. That was, the junior member explained, because it was selling well. Peter thought that the book which was n't selling well ought to be advertised, not the one which was; but the junior member explained that this was a fallacy often entertained by authors. "If a book begins to sell, we begin to advertise it. If it does n't sell, we don't." Peter remarked that it seemed to him that in order to make the public buy a book, the public must be made aware that such a book existed, which could only be done by advertising. He then mentioned incidentally

that he had another one well under way. The junior member, avoiding the latter part of Peter's reply, explained that it had been found that unless a book had the elements of popular success, it was useless to advertise it, and popular successes always revealed themselves by the speed with which they caught the popular fancy. This seemed, said Peter, to be rather hard on the other authors, the great mass of whom must have their books thrown on the market without the help of any impetus on the part of their publishers. What, Peter asked, did the junior partner consider a good sale? Not the best seller, but a good average sale? The junior member answered, five thousand. Peter did a little mental arithmetic and, to his horror, discovered that this meant a royalty of about six hundred and seventy-five dollars. "That," answered Peter, "would mean for me, as it took me two years to write it, a remuneration of three hundred and thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents a year!" The junior member raised his eyebrows as much as to say that *he* had n't asked Peter to write it, and Peter asked almost threateningly, "Don't you think my book will sell more than five thousand?"

"Oh, it won't sell that much!" answered the junior partner. "A novel which sells five thousand copies is doing very well in our opinion. Now, while yours has, I believe, made a very good showing for a first effort by an unknown writer, I'm afraid it won't reach anything like that amount."

And Peter, suddenly cast down by a chill of dis-

couragement, was afraid to ask how much it might reach. Peter said good-morning awkwardly and went away, aware that a distinct feeling of dislike had arisen in him toward his publishers, and the junior member in particular, and he had just decided not to allow them the privilege of reading his new manuscript when he remembered that, according to his contract with them, he was obliged to do so.

On reviewing this interview afterwards, Peter had to admit that he could hardly blame the publisher for his point of view, but a bad attack of the blues followed, during which he could n't work and, seeking distraction where he could find it, he got into the habit of spending a good deal of time at the Wildwoods'. He had begun to think about Vera as any young man, ready to fall in love at the slightest opportunity, is likely to think about any very nice young woman he happens to be thrown with. He even ventured to tell her about his interview with the junior partner — he had told no one else, not even Ted — and this confidence seemed to draw them together a little. Vera tried to cheer him up and really spurred him into a more philosophical state of mind, for which Peter could not help feeling grateful, even though he did feel that he would have liked an attitude a little more tenderly sympathetic. Peter was in too much of a hurry.

Peter occupied Vera's thoughts at times, too. Her admiration for Peter's talent, added to the personal harmony which existed between them, developed a

bond of which Vera was, perhaps, more deeply conscious than Peter himself, which was the reason, perhaps, why she instinctively clung to a more impersonal attitude toward him than Peter liked.

Peter's statement arrived at last. It came late one afternoon when Ted was out, arriving with admirable punctuality on the very day called for in the contract. Peter drew a long breath and, opening the envelope, drew out a cheque for, not six hundred and seventy-five dollars, not even for three hundred and thirty-seven fifty, but for the contemptible sum of one hundred and twenty-two dollars and ninety-eight cents. Apparently less than a thousand copies had been sold.

Peter immediately had two powerful impulses. One was to tear the cheque up and throw it into the fire, another to seize the pitcher and basin of his washstand and hurl them through his closed window. The impulse to perform these two acts simultaneously, probably prevented him from doing either of them, and instead he ran upstairs and knocked at the Wildwoods' door.

Peter in that short distance had, from feeling furiously rebellious, become suddenly very very sorry for himself, and when Vera opened the door she saw at once that something had happened.

He came into the room with a queer, pained, wretched smile, holding the cheque out to her. She took it and, at a glance, understood.

"Oh, you poor boy!" she exclaimed; and then cried indignantly, "It can't be right! They've cheated you!"

She led him to the sitting-room sofa — Uncle John was out — and with a sympathy and understanding altogether delightful tried to buck Peter up. Something tender seemed to envelop them that afternoon which Peter often thought of gratefully afterwards, and sitting alone together they had a dear, intimate, encouraging talk, ending in a little Tennyson. When Uncle John returned Vera had just finished reading to Peter — she did n't mention the fact —

“Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean!
Tears from the depths of some divine despair!”

CHAPTER XIX

PETER was thankful for Vera's sympathy, and when he was with her drank gratefully whatever draughts of it she chose to offer, but she had her work to do during daytime, and pride kept him from running there too much in the evenings. He tried to work on his new book, but, realizing that he could do nothing with it until he had recovered from the shock of his disappointment at the failure of "The Prisoner," he abandoned all effort at writing and proceeded restlessly to kill time as best he could, avoiding Ted, who, to his shame and Ted's mortification, seemed to irritate him.

One evening just as he was getting ready to go to bed the telephone rang. It was Millicent!

"Is that Mr. Peter Watertight? Oh, is that you, Peter? We're at the Alcazar! Muriel's got a beau; don't you want to be mine for a while? Come along. We're going to have supper!"

Peter accepted promptly.

Muriel and Millicent were waiting in the foyer with a young man with plastered hair and a red face which Peter seemed to have seen before. This young man was introduced as Mr. Richmond, when Peter remembered that he had come in late to Dora's party. Mr. Richmond — Tim — greeted him genially, and, upon the waiter's depositing immediately four cocktails on the table ac-

according to custom, sent him back for four more. Tim met all objections by announcing that he was host and that, as he was making six dollars a week, why, "Damn expense! Ain't that so, Millie?" — and he squeezed her knee, causing her to jump in her chair.

"There are other people making money beside you," retorted Millicent. "Mr. Watergate here had a novel published not long ago."

"What publisher?" Tim asked, and Peter told him. Tim shrugged his shoulders.

"Are n't they all right?" asked Peter, afraid that they were n't.

"All right so far as I know. How's your book selling? Making any money?"

"No," answered Peter.

"Well, they never do!"

"Some of them do," Peter replied, naming half a dozen.

"Well, perhaps. But none of 'em make as much as you think. There's nothin' in it. Hello, here are the other cocktails!"

Peter was already so dejected that Tim's pessimism made the second cocktail very welcome, and he was delighted to observe that under its stimulus his low spirits were gradually dissolving. It was really wonderful. Presently all the burden of discouragement and depression dropped away from him. Something warm and glowing seemed to be running through his veins. The music took on extraordinary rhapsodic qualities, the

lights glowed with a kind of magic radiance, and his companions with qualities of delightful geniality and charm.

This was n't all due to the cocktails, because Tim, who had already acquired a powerful taste for champagne, was ordering it freely.

When closing time came, Millicent, Muriel, and Tim did n't feel like going to bed. Tim proposed a ride through the Park in a taxi, but the girls insisted on a walk. Peter was beginning to feel rather sleepy, but finding themselves on the sidewalk, they started uptown. They walked straight up Broadway, past the Circle, until somewhere in the eighties they turned west and found themselves by the river. It seemed to Peter that it took an incredibly short time to get there. He and Millicent, who were walking arm in arm, moved with an extraordinary and delightful buoyancy, and a short distance ahead Tim and Muriel, bounding too lightly forward, had no difficulty in maintaining one certain distance between them.

They seated themselves on benches. The night was mild and absolutely still. From the river arose, far and near at intervals, the muffled, deep, slightly melancholy notes of the whistles of harbor boats. Distant, occasional lights starred the shadows of the Palisades opposite; through the trees behind them rose the enormous buildings of the Drive, and in a faint gleam of misty moonlight the river stretched mysteriously away to be lost finally in the obscurity of the night.

Peter shivered.

"Are you cold?" asked Millicent.

"A little," he answered.

"Why, you silly boy, you came without your overcoat."

"It's all right," replied Peter reassuringly. He noticed without surprise that he had a little difficulty in enunciating distinctly, and, also without surprise, that Millicent laughed a little indulgent laugh.

"City wonderful now!" He was dimly conscious of the solemn hush around them. "Nature never has a chance in city except at night."

"Yes, it's lovely and quiet. Better than Broadway, is n't it, Peter?"

"Is n't moon shining?" Peter asked plaintively, and shivered once more.

Millicent laughed again.

"You *are* cold; here, get inside my coat." She stood up, made Peter do so, too, and, opening the full folds of her coat, enclosed him in them. "Now sit down." They sat down, both wrapped warmly in.

"Never see moon in New York!" Peter asserted. "Never know it's shining until you're in bed and asleep. This is nice and warm!"

He felt an arm under the folds encircle him and Millicent draw closer to him. The cool air swept his cheek refreshingly, but his body was wrapped in an envelope of grateful warmth. A shoulder seemed suddenly to present itself on which to lay his head, and he slept, bliss-

fully supported on Millicent's rounded yet muscular arm.

By every moral law, I suppose Peter should have waked up the next morning with a bad headache, an added fund of depression, and a disordered digestion, but he did n't. He felt better than he had for weeks. He was even kind to Ted. A slight residue of intoxication of a most subtly subdued and unobtrusive character — suitable for the morning — remained to cheer him, and, as he dressed, Ted heard with astonishment and pleasure an unaccustomed sound issuing from Peter's room. A cascade of notes, repetitions with a lacework of trills and cadenzas of some of the music the Alcazar orchestra had played the night before. Peter had n't whistled for a long time.

But he was as disinclined to work as ever, and spent the morning wandering on the Avenue and sitting in the Park with a newspaper, lunching finally at the little restaurant where he and Ted had lunched with Vera and her father some weeks before. It was too cold for the garden and he sat in the low basement dining-room — which had only one occupant: the youngish man with a Napoleonic cast of countenance who had been there on that other day. His black bag rested on a chair as it had before, and, on seeing Peter, he immediately bowed and said good-morning. Peter returned the salute and began his luncheon, but he was conscious that the stranger looked frequently in his direction and felt sure for some reason that presently he would speak to him.

Presently the stranger did so.

"How is Mr. Filbert, sir?" he asked.

"I have n't seen him," answered Peter.

"Nor have I."

"I can give you his address now," said Peter. By this time everybody in the Kilkenny knew and had even seen the brand-new exterior of the swell bachelor apartment house where Fred had taken up his quarters.

"Would you like it?"

"Very much, sir."

Peter gave it to him, and the stranger, folding up the piece of paper on which it was written, thanked him, and putting it in his pocket, got up and came over to Peter's table, carrying his cup of coffee with him.

"May I drink this at your table?" he asked, and sat down without ceremony, saying at once, "What is your opinion of Mr. Filbert as a man?"

"I hardly know him," answered Peter.

"I did n't mean, of course, from the point of view of his profession," said the stranger explanatorily, "because the man who wastes his life in writing stories is —"

"Now wait just a minute," interrupted Peter; "that's my profession, too!"

The stranger had received a palpable hit. He was silent for some time, but at last he said: "I'm sorry I said that. It revealed traits of dogmatism and prejudice which I am always fighting against."

Peter smiled, noticing that the stranger's compunc-

tion was due not to a possible wounding of Peter's feelings, but to what he might have revealed of his own character; but he liked him for his honesty, nevertheless, and replied that it did n't matter; whereupon the stranger returned to Fred.

"I am interested in Mr. Filbert through my interest in a lady who used to be a neighbor of his, Miss St. David."

"We all like Miss St. David very much," answered Peter; "do you know her?"

"I was called in to treat her for a sudden illness some time ago, and, although I only saw her once, I found myself thinking about her a good deal afterwards. From my observations and what I gathered she is an unhappy woman."

"I think she is," Peter answered.

"She should marry!" He took two cigars from his waistcoat pocket and offered one to Peter. Peter declined, not liking the looks of it.

"Yes, I know that marriage is often looked upon as a cure-all!" Peter replied.

"Good God! I'm not speaking generally. Can't you see that in this particular case what the woman needs is a husband?"

Peter, who was now drinking his coffee, too, paused reflectively before answering.

"Perhaps you're right. But she seems very fond of gaiety and going about."

"Why should n't she?" exclaimed the stranger; "she

lives alone. I have a theory about her. I believe that she is a woman who has at some previous time committed a fault and been divorced by her husband and that she has practically hidden herself in New York to get away from her past."

"She may be a divorced woman, but I don't believe it was through any fault of hers," answered Peter loyally.

"Why not?" the stranger demanded.

"Well, we believe in her at the Kilkenny," answered Peter, "and we think that she has been badly used by somebody."

"Why?" asked the stranger again.

"How can any one tell exactly how convictions are formed without actual knowledge? — but that's the way we feel about Miss St. David — and then, here's another thing. A number of us were discussing divorce not so very long ago and a book in which a woman is unfaithful to her husband, and Miss St. David said that night that unhappy women are always like that in novels, but hardly ever in real life. It may have been that she was thinking of herself."

"That is mere assumption," asserted the stranger dogmatically.

"Our whole conversation is based on your assumption that she is a divorced woman," answered Peter.

The stranger laughed shortly. "I admit that," he answered. "But we are getting away from the point. My contention is that Miss St. David ought to marry

and I have sometimes wondered why Mr. Filbert has n't been the man."

"Would such a marriage give you satisfaction as a well-wisher of Miss St. David or of Filbert?"

"It would give me satisfaction as a well-wisher of both."

"Well, in my opinion, the woman who marries Fred Filbert is to be pitied."

"Why?"

"Because I believe him to be a selfish brute!"

"Then he would probably make her behave herself!"

"What right have you to say that she does n't?"

"None!" answered the stranger.

"I would n't do it, then, if I were you!" And Peter got up, paid his bill, and went out. As he mounted the step leading to the area he glanced through the window at the table he had just left. The stranger was still seated at it. His elbows rested on it and his head was sunk between his hands.

"What a strange chap!" thought Peter as he walked down the Avenue. An oddity apparently, yet not exactly an oddity either. Rather a man of extraordinary force of character; his features and those compelling eyes of his indicated that. Too dogmatic and assertive, though, for comfort. And yet what an outlandish conversation! What absurd statements! Wanting Fred Filbert to marry a woman he — the stranger — had never seen but once, so that she might be made to behave herself! Clearly the man *must* be irrational!

Peter stopped at the Wildwoods' flat when he got home — it was by this time well along in the afternoon — and told Vera, who — remembering the incident of the telephone — was tremendously interested.

"He must be connected with Dora's life in some way," she said after Peter had finished.

"He said he had only seen her once," answered Peter.

"Perhaps he was n't telling the truth."

"I don't believe he's the kind of man to tell lies," said Peter with conviction.

"If we could only ask Mr. Fred Filbert a few questions, but he probably would n't answer them. I wrote and asked him to call, but he never paid any attention to my letter."

But if they could n't question Fred, the stranger could, and at that very moment was. At just about the time Peter reached the Kilkenny, Fred's bell rang, and, opening his door, he was a good deal surprised and not particularly pleased to find the doctor standing on his doormat.

Fred, who was to take tea with Edith Richmond late that afternoon, had been spending the day over the manuscript which Charles had asked him to rewrite. He had been spending many days over it, not with much profit. He was tired of it as only an author can be tired of his creations, loathed his characters, and could not rid himself of the feeling that he was tackling a heavy, inert mass incapable of vivification. He was tempted to submit it as it was to other publishers, sure

that many of them would be glad to take it, and would have done so except for the fact that he did not feel like offending Edith's husband. On the other hand, he wished that Edith might prevail on Charles to take it as it was, and yet could not bring himself to ask her this favor. His position was irritating, and yet he could do nothing to improve it; therefore he slaved hopelessly away at it, intent only on getting it off his hands with the least possible amount of effort.

Fred was so surprised at seeing the doctor that he stood stock-still blocking the doorway until the other's resolute advance forced him to step to one side. Whereupon Fred, making a virtue of necessity after the doctor was already standing in the hall, exclaimed, but without any great cordiality:

"How do you do! Come in!"

"I heard you had moved," explained the doctor, "and I've been intending to look you up, but I only got your address to-day."

They had gone into Fred's sitting-room and had seated themselves. Whatever the doctor's business — and Fred had n't much doubt about its character — Fred hoped that he would be properly impressed by the evidence of prosperity with which he had surrounded himself, but the doctor was n't that kind. The cheerlessness and lack of comfort of his own quarters indicated that he was rarely conscious of the character of his material environment, and, to Fred's indignation, he presently asked:

"Like it here better than your old place?"

"Like it better!" answered Fred with irritation. "How could I help liking it better? This is the kind of a place you ought to have!"

The doctor opened his eyes in astonishment.

"What's the matter with my place?" — and for the first time he looked about him. "This is nice, though!" he remarked, "very nice. Handsome sofa you've got there!" And he indicated a piece recently purchased by Fred covered with green plush, which Fred had thought rather handsome himself until a visitor who seemed to know about such things had happened to remark on its peculiarly atrocious design. "Where's your bedroom?"

Fred showed him the bedroom, the bathroom, the kitchenette, the refrigerating coil, the alabaster lamps, and the thermostat. The doctor, who submitted perfunctorily to this display, exhibited real interest when brought face to face with the refrigerating coil. He looked over it, under it, felt it, borrowed Fred's thermometer, and shut it in with it, and finally asked Fred what rent he paid. "A thing like that would come in very handy in my experiments!" he remarked.

Fred told him the rent and the doctor frowned.

"Too much for me," he said.

He opened the door, took out the thermometer, looked at it, gazed regretfully into the refrigerating coil and then abruptly returned to Fred's sitting-room. Fred offered him a cigar and he took it, looking at Fred as he had always looked. A look which had a quality of

rather pitying appraisal in it which irritated Fred and at the same time made him uncomfortable.

"How's Miss St. David?" the doctor asked presently.

"I don't know," Fred answered. "Have n't seen her."

"Quarrelled?"

"No!"

"Then why not?"

Fred would like to have replied that it was none of the doctor's business, but he was afraid to, so he answered:

"No special reason."

"Expect to see her soon?"

"I doubt it!"

"Why not?"

"Because," answered Fred explosively, resenting the doctor's insistence, "I've cut out Dora St. David and that bunch for good and all!"

"She would n't give you what you wanted so you're going to leave her in the lurch. Is that it?"

"What do you mean by leaving her in the lurch?" demanded Fred.

"What about your promise?"

"What promise?" asked Fred brazenly.

"Your promise to marry her."

"I asked her. She would n't have me."

The doctor shot such lightning glances at him that it made Fred uncomfortable in spite of the fact that he knew his position to be unassailable.

"I believe you're lying, Filbert."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" answered Fred with a show of indifference; "tell the police about Miss St. David's attempted suicide six months ago?"

"You know I can't do that, Filbert," answered the doctor. "That's what you're counting on!"

"Then I reckon you can't do anything," retorted Fred.

"Filbert," said the doctor slowly, "you are a despicable cur."

"I want you to get out of here!" Fred shouted, making a threatening gesture, but he did not approach the doctor, and the latter made no attempt to leave his chair.

"A despicable cur," repeated the doctor, biting each syllable as he delivered it and throwing it as it were into Fred's face, "a liar and a scoundrel! I'm not finished with you yet, Fred Filbert!" And taking his half-smoked cigar from his mouth he dashed it down fiercely on Fred's brand-new hundred-and-fifty-dollar rug where it immediately began to burn a hole. "Here!" cried Fred, kicking it into the fireplace. "What are you doing?"

But the doctor, disdaining to reply, calmly and with an air of ineffable contempt helped himself to a handful of Fred's cigars which he stuffed into his pocket, lighted another, drew his hat tightly down on his head, and went out, slamming the front door after him so furiously that two pictures in the hallway fell from their nails with the clatter of breaking glass. Fred, swearing angrily, was down on his knees scraping up the remains

of the doctor's cigar which he had ground into the rug. A small but distinct burn was revealed. At the sound of the slamming door and of breaking glass he rushed into the hall, and perceiving the ruin wrought by the doctor dashed open the door and looked over the railing of the stairway. He saw the head and shoulders of the doctor and heard the steady tread of his feet descending the marble steps.

"I'll sue you for this!" Fred shouted down at him. But without indicating that he had heard, the doctor continued his descent with the same steady tread until reaching the bottom of the last flight he disappeared from view. Fred went back and began sweeping up the particles of broken glass. Suddenly he stopped and looked at his watch in consternation. It was five o'clock, the hour at which he was to meet Edith. He dropped his broom, rushed into his bedroom, where he made a breathless toilet, hurried downstairs, and jumping into a taxicab gave Edith's number. He was half an hour late, but luckily her house was not far away. On entering it he heard — as the closing of the outer door shut away the sounds of the street — voices in Edith's little sanctum.

William, the Swedish butler who opened the door, announced that Mrs. Richmond was in her parlor, and Fred, immediately making for it, perceived, to his chagrin, that somebody else was taking tea with Edith. Edith greeted him with her accustomed smile, her companion turned, and Fred recognized Peter Watergate.

Fred had received his card from Edith and had called immediately. Peter had received one, too, and had also made *his* call. Peter did n't go again, but Fred did, and Edith, engaged with him in the preliminary skirmishes of her favorite pastime, had thought no more of Peter until she chanced to meet him on two occasions walking on the Avenue with Vera. This annoyed her and she invited him to dinner.

Peter's book had just made its appearance, and he rather expected that this event would make of him the guest of honor, but nobody mentioned it, not even Edith. He had a very good time, however, found everybody good-natured and lively, and made his duty call promptly. This time Edith did mention his book, saying she had n't done so before because she had preferred to wait until — if he did n't mind — they could discuss it seriously — which, of course, they could n't do at a dinner party. Edith had n't heard of it at the time of the dinner party and had only chanced on an advertisement of it in the paper the next day. She had immediately sent for it and read it. When she had come into the room, the manner of her greeting him, Peter thought, had something particularly charming about it. The way she had extended her left hand caused him to feel that its clasp was infinitely more intimate, more warm than that of the right, and that hand-clasp with its accompanying silent welcoming smile of eye and lip, suddenly awoke in him a realization that here was an unusual woman; a woman of quick understandings and ready

sympathies. Vera's words, in spite of their cordiality, had something cheerily impersonal about them, but Edith's were richly and welcomingly intimate with a note of softness as if she lived under the shadow of some sacrifice which life demanded of her, and which she made quietly and unflinchingly.

Peter went away determined to go again as soon as he decently could and thanked Ted that night for having prompted him to make use of Pitt's letter. He said that he felt that there was something tremendously fine about Mrs. Richmond, but he feared that she was n't quite happy. Every young man, he thought, should know a woman of that kind. She would keep him from forgetting — among the temptations of a great city — the higher duties of life. Some day he would take Ted to see her too, so that he also might have the benefit of her influence and counsel.

Ted answered that he was much obliged, but being very shy and not feeling the need of making confidences, resolved that he would n't go if he could get out of it. Peter, in fact, used to talk about Ted a good deal to Edith at first, and once or twice suggested bringing him around, but somehow or other something always prevented and after a while he forgot about it.

Peter at this time became suddenly immersed in feminine society. His acquaintance with Vera had developed rapidly and steadily into a real friendship, more impersonal than it had promised to become. Peter was willing that this should be so because of his growing

intimacy with Millicent Blomfield. Since the night that he had slept on her shoulder, he had spent many an evening with Tim and the sisters, and, too, many an evening with Millicent alone. The friendship between himself and Vera might be that of two youths — with occasional lapses into sentimentality, when Tennyson might be read — but Millicent, now that he had come to know her better, revealed herself all woman. On first acquaintance she had seemed a little too hard, too constantly alert against danger, bred in a school where wariness had become so much a habit that she could not shake it off, but with Peter her manner had quickly changed. Her Broadway accent and vocabulary grated on him at times, but not sufficiently to counteract her attractions. Her femininity showed through her toughness as soft and capricious as that of any sheltered beauty. She seemed strong in her weakness, weak in her strength, bold, muscular, and beautiful; and at times, for the slightest urging, Peter's to do what he pleased with, and Peter, perceiving this, wavered; abashed, determined, and uncertain.

It might be thought that these two friendships of Peter's — Vera's and Millicent's — would have sufficed him, but during the period of his depression over the failure of his book he was ready for sympathy wherever he could find it, and Edith's attitude being a generally sympathetic one, he went there as often as Edith meant that he should.

At this time, the day when Fred found Peter taking

tea in his place — at least, that was the way Fred regarded it — things had gone rather far between Fred and Edith. That is, the affair was in full swing to Edith's great satisfaction and Fred her abject slave. Sometimes he gave indications that he might not always prove to be a tractable one, which caused Edith a little concern, but she had always been able to manage her cavaliers before, and her confidence in her ability to do so now, coupled with the fascinations of the game itself and the attractions of Fred's impetuous style of making love, carried her heedlessly on the current of this new and novel affair.

Fred was annoyed at seeing Peter, but Peter, fresh from his conversation with the stranger, and later with Vera, was delighted at meeting Fred and determined to pump him if he could. For that reason, and because he *was* enjoying himself, he stayed on and on intending to leave when Fred did. He should, of course, have gone away after a decent interval, but he did n't, thereby annoying Fred excessively. Edith enjoyed the situation — Fred was being punished for being late and giving besides a delicious exhibition of foolish jealousy — and she determined to have them there together often.

Fred finally got tired of trying to out-stay Peter and got up. Peter did, too, and they went away together, Fred very glum and Peter well pleased with himself because of a conviction that he had plainly outshone Filbert in Edith's presence, and, in consequence, inclined to regard Fred from an attitude of good-natured

indulgence. Peter tackled his subject as soon as they got down the steps.

"I happened to meet a curious kind of customer to-day who knows you!"

"Did you?" replied Fred rudely; "well, what of it? What's his name?"

"I don't know his name. He had a kind of Napoleonic look and carried a small black bag."

"Yes, I know him," remarked Fred gruffly.

"He mentioned Miss St. David, too. Is he a friend of hers?"

"No, he is n't. What did he say about her?"

"He seemed to be more interested in you. Wanted to know where you lived!"

Fred stopped short.

"Did you tell him?" he asked from between his teeth.

"Yes! Why should n't I?" Peter noticed Fred's threatening attitude and answered defiantly.

Fred's ill-humor which had been accumulating all the afternoon suddenly burst.

"You damned little conceited ass!" he almost shouted.

"Why don't you mind your own business? I'll tell people where I live myself if I want 'em to know, without your assistance; and look here! I suppose you think you've made a great impression on Mrs. Richmond! Well, let me tell you, you keep away from there or I'll break your neck!"

"I always take a dare, you know!" answered Peter coolly.

"Do you? Well, you'll take the consequences too, then, you —"

Peter moved away to get out of earshot of Fred's stream of abuse.

"Pah! What a vulgar brute!" he exclaimed to himself. "I hope he does n't inflict himself on poor Mrs. Richmond often!"

He was furious at Fred's insults and depressed by the outrageous coarseness of the oaths Fred had hurled after him. But what could Filbert have warned him away from the Richmonds' for? Could he be in love with Mrs. Richmond? If that were so, she should surely be cautioned or guarded — Peter liked the latter word best — against such a brutal creature, and he made up his mind to go there oftener than ever.

CHAPTER XX

As Fred had told the doctor, he had made up his mind to cut out the "bunch" at the Kilkenny. Therefore he had n't called on Vera in response to her note nor had he acknowledged the note itself. As he was n't going to see any of them again, what was the use? And quite ignorant of the fact that ordinary politeness demanded a reply, he tore the note up and threw it into the wastebasket.

He had begun to perceive that his career was bearing him above and beyond the coterie at the Kilkenny, and that it would be a piece of stupidity on his part to place obstacles in the way of his own progress.

When he perceived that he was being borne above and beyond his old place in life, he was thinking, not of his professional, but of his social career. Among the humble companions of earlier days each used to seem to say, "You are as good as I," while Edith and the small circle she gave him access to seemed to be proclaiming so constantly, "We are better than other people," that the other people had got into the habit of thinking that it must be so, and Fred, easily influenced where his vanity was concerned, had come to believe that he was better than other people too.

Edith's manner and that of her friends on entering a shop, a restaurant, a theatre, or, indeed, under all cir-

cumstances seemed to say confidently, "I am an extremely important person," and they believed this so sincerely that, by mere force of this unquestioning acceptance of a to them incontrovertible fact, they really *had* become people of importance whose movements were chronicled and whose pictures were published in the daily and weekly periodicals, assisted by Edith and her friends themselves, who, graciously endeavoring to satisfy the curiosity of the general public, kept the papers well supplied with their photographs and thoroughly informed as to their various social activities.

The account of some social affair, a ball, for instance, at the Ritz, would arouse extraordinary interest. This ball, given, perhaps, by a beef-trust or tobacco magnate and attended by various stock and insurance brokers, real-estate agents, other beef-trust or tobacco magnates, speculators, merchants in a large way of business, manufacturers, occasional professional men, etc., etc., and their wives, aroused interest because these very wives of these particular merchants, stock-brokers, and manufacturers, tacitly claiming to be better than the wives of other business persons, had formed a society among themselves and would have nothing to do with anybody else. For some obscure reason, because they would n't invite people to their gatherings, everybody wanted to be invited, notwithstanding the fact that the gatherings in question were no more expensive than many another.

It was into this society that Edith had begun to in-

roduce Fred. It may be thought that such an action required immense courage on Edith's part, but, no, for Fred was very much like any other big, bouncing, self-seeking, animalistic male creature in society or out.

A period of veritable enchantment now ensued for Fred. He was in love with Edith, and Edith, like a good and gracious fairy, was, in return for his devotion, condescending to open, as with a fairy wand, a New York more magical than he had ever dreamed of. Infinitely beyond that of his earlier conceptions, compounded as it had been of billiard parlors, sensational murders, baseball, and the poor painted wretches he used to be proud to claim acquaintance with.

Fred could hardly open his paper now — when, after breakfast, clad in a dressing-gown of Persian pattern with a cigar between his teeth — without seeing his own name included among the society notes. Some of the notes he had himself sent, but they gave him as much pleasure as those which he had not, and all infinitely more, for some strange reason, than any which had ever had anything to do with his career as a novelist. Fred, whose worldly education was yet so limited that he could n't have told you what a snob was, had already become one.

Fred was in love with Edith and in love with himself for being in love with her. He had scaled the heights and enslaved — or thought he had — one of the royal family living in the castle which crowned them, a feat for which, you may be sure, he was not backward in award-

ing himself praise. Edith fascinated, baffled, confused, and at times made him unhappy, but while he was immensely proud and uplifted at being admitted into relations of such intimate friendship with her, he was perfectly certain, in consequence of it, that he must be a very fine fellow.

That Edith had him, so to speak, stretched flat on a dissecting table, experimenting with him according to formulæ which she had made use of often before, and that when she had finished she would expect him to get down and go quietly away, he never for a moment dreamed. If he had realized how slight his hold over her really was, he might not have been as exigent as at times he persisted in being. However, they were for the present both deep in a game which Edith understood perfectly and Fred not at all, and were together almost every day.

Everybody in the Penfield *ménage* being used to this sort of thing, nobody cared, excepting Charles, and he cared mightily. It was bad enough having to be decent to men of his own class who were flirting with his wife, but a damned mucker like Filbert!

There was something fearfully humiliating in the whole situation. Charles, accustomed — sitting in his office — to pass judgment on the hopes and aspirations of those wretched suppliants who came continually to see him, was actually being ousted by one of them out of his rightful place. To be sure, he never occupied it, but the thought of that did n't assuage the bitterness of his

reflections. It was Fred Filbert who was now occupying one end of the seat in his wife's town car with Charles in the middle — the damned mucker — and his secretary had told him that she was sure that it was Fred's chewing-gum he had stepped on that day!

Charles, hoping to prejudice Edith against Fred, had told her of this incident, but Edith had only laughed, whereupon Charles, hurrying into his own room and closing the door, had begun to swear savagely. At times Charles, clenching his fists, would hiss to himself, "You wait!" — meaning that sooner or later he would have his revenge. He repeated this threat often, more, however, to prove to himself that he was n't a mean little coward than for any other reason.

Fred spent his mornings more luxuriously than he had any business to. At ten, his breakfast, appearing from the lower regions, would lure him from bed, to which he had returned after going through the preliminary evolutions of his toilet. Slipping his large shape into his Persian dressing-gown and his feet into a pair of crimson morocco bedroom slippers, he would seat himself at table whence for the space of half an hour the cracking of eggshells, the munching of toast, and the clatter of his coffee-cup would echo in the room.

After finishing his breakfast — at about half-past ten — he would light a cigar and spend an hour reading the paper. At half-past eleven he would sit reluctantly down to the task of pulling, pushing, and twisting the new material and the old ingredients of his novel about, hop-

ing to force them finally into some shape acceptable to Richmond Sons & Richmond. An hour of this work found him quite ready for an excuse to stop, and as he was not yet dressed, one was always at hand. After another half-hour spent on his toilet, he would emerge at about one equipped to enjoy himself for the remainder of the day. Fred knew that he was playing too much and not working half hard enough, but as he had a balance of twenty thousand dollars at his bank and as various small royalties from his books and scenarios were coming in intermittently, there was no immediate necessity for it.

On leaving his rooms at one, Fred would invariably repair to some fashionable restaurant. Sometimes to lunch with Edith, sometimes alone, or sometimes with some chance opportune acquaintance.

After luncheon, if Edith were not there, he would kill time laboriously until the hour arrived at which he was to meet her somewhere, a reception, a game of auction, or a cup of tea in Edith's own parlor.

But during all this time Fred, at intervals, would ask himself questions. What were they getting at? Here he was spending time and money, and what did it amount to? It was very nice going around with swell people and being in "the know" — Fred had heard this expression somewhere and was much taken by it — but as far as getting anything out of it went, it seemed to him to be another case of Dora St. David, only, of course, on a different plane. During these periods of reflection he

would become exigent, which delighted Edith if he was n't too much so. These scenes — there was no opportunity for them anywhere else — always took place in Edith's parlor, and one day, when Fred had been unusually difficult, Peter was announced.

Edith, who was angry with Fred for being so hard to manage, welcomed Peter cordially, and managed to send Fred away so adroitly that Fred himself wondered afterward how she did it.

Fred walked home angry and humiliated. Angry with Edith for not being able to make headway with her, humiliated at having to leave the field to Peter, and for the first time, as he thought, the victim of jealousy. Edith's manner toward Peter seemed suspiciously friendly and Peter's suspiciously assured. Was she playing a double game with him? Was she getting tired of him? Could she be merely flirting with him? Fred's resentment, however, was directed mainly against Peter, who, in spite of Fred's previous threats, had greeted him with a cool unconcern which Fred found fearfully exasperating.

After Fred had gone, Peter, presuming deliciously on his friendship with Mrs. Richmond, ventured to give her some good advice.

"Of course, what I mean to say," Peter explained, "is that Filbert is n't exactly a gentleman."

"Oh, Mr. Watergate!" Edith exclaimed softly; "I'm sure he is. I know what you mean! That he's a little brusque at times, perhaps, but —"

"I'd call it loud-mouthed and rude!" interrupted Peter.

"Now, Mr. Watergate! Please, please, you must not misjudge him! I really can't allow it; and then he *is* so talented! Mr. Watergate, I'm afraid that you men of genius are not very charitable toward one another —"

"Oh, now, really —!" cried Peter, blushing and looking down.

"Yes, I mean it; you're not and you must be. Mr. Filbert has had his own way to make in the world, but he has a good heart. From the very first I felt that all his life he had gone without certain things and that he had always craved them. Do you know what I mean?"

"I suppose you mean that he needed the friendship and the influence of some kind, unselfish woman," said Peter.

Edith took one of Peter's hands and squeezed it for a moment.

"How dear of you to say that!" she answered; "but that is only partly what I meant. He needed intercourse with people who had been brought up in a sphere outside his own. I felt that it would not only help *him*, his outlook and point of view, but that it would broaden his talent. If I could do that, would I not be justified in going to a little trouble?"

"Of course, I know that it's presumptuous and conceited to give *you* advice," answered Peter, "but it seemed to me that Filbert is the kind of man who might

easily misunderstand your kindness. He's pretty conceited, you know!"

Edith laughed ripplingly.

"Now, Mr. Watergate! How could he misunderstand it? Do you mean that he might — might fall in love with me?"

"Well — well, yes," answered Peter shyly.

"Oh, Mr. Watergate, *what* nonsense!" Her expression softened and she half-concealed a sigh. "No one will ever fall in love with me again, Mr. Watergate. I do my best to look at life bravely and brightly, but at heart I'm only a tired woman who will soon be old."

A little lump came in Peter's throat.

"Don't say that, Mrs. Richmond. No one could ever think of you as old; only wonderfully wise, experienced, and tolerant because you have been given an opportunity to see and know so much of life!"

"Then you must trust me a little," answered Edith with a bright smile; "and I really want you to be very nice to poor Mr. Filbert. Please! For my sake!"

Peter promised, and, true to his promise, *was* very nice to Fred, but Fred, believing that Peter's amiability was due to the conviction that he — Peter — was getting the best of him, resented it wrathfully, as Edith knew he would.

The day after this conversation Edith had another — with Fred this time — of a very different sort.

Fred had called her up on the telephone in the morning and was coming in to tea — Edith knew, too, that

he was coming for an explanation — Edith loved explanations.

"Where's your lapdog!" he asked as soon as he came in. He looked offended, threatening, and angry.

"I have n't a dog!" replied Edith. "What do you mean?"

"I mean your jumping-jack with the big nose and skinny legs. Watergate, of course! Your tame cat!"

"I'll tame you, my friend!" said Edith under her breath.

"When you're going to have him here in the future," continued Fred with the same truculent manner, "let me know and I'll stay away."

"Very well," answered Edith.

Fred looked at her angrily, gave her a moment to add to her brief reply if she wanted to, and, finding that she did n't, he burst out:

"Well, what does it all mean?"

"What does what mean?"

"What's to be the finish? Do you think I'm going to let you make a fool of me and say nothing? If you think I'm the kind of man you can take up and throw away again whenever it suits you, you'll find yourself very much mistaken! I'm no Peter Watergate or Charlie Richmond!"

Edith had heard reproaches of this kind before — perhaps not quite so brutally rude — and had listened to them with self-control; but Fred's reference to her husband as "Charlie" very curiously aroused her an-

ger. So far as she could remember nobody had ever called Charles "Charlie" before. Certainly Fred Filbert had no right to.

When Edith became angry, instead of growing hot she froze.

"I think you had better go," she answered icily.

"You do, do you?" replied Fred menacingly. "You think that when you want to get rid of me, that's all you'll have to say? Well, you'll find that you've got another guess coming!"

Edith got up, started for the door, and Fred barred the way. They stood fighting each other with their eyes, but Edith was the stronger. Fred suddenly threw out his hands with a supplicating gesture.

"Edith!" he cried appealingly, and he advanced a step toward her.

She shrank back.

"Don't touch me," she answered. She saw instantly that she controlled the situation again, and as she did so her anger vanished and her enjoyment of it returned. She adored this kind of thing passionately.

"Don't touch me!" she repeated; adding, "Are you going?"

"Edith!" Fred exclaimed hoarsely. "Edith, I did n't mean what I said! I take it all back! I made up my mind before I came to be careful, but I got angry and forgot myself!"

Edith knew, of course, that this was not true, but did n't say so. Instead she answered, "Very well, then,

until you have yourself under better control you had better not come here!"

"Do you mean that, Edith?" cried Fred pleadingly.

Edith relented a little. "I don't want to mean it, but you give me no choice. Do you suppose that because we are good friends, I am never to say how do you do to another man? Do you suppose that taking tea here with me gives you the right to make a scene if I ask anybody else? Because if you do, you'll find that I shan't submit to it!"

"No, no, Edith, I did n't mean that," answered the by now wretched Fred.

"What *did* you mean?"

"Don't you realize how much I'm in love with you?" he burst out. "Don't you know how jealous it makes me to have you with *anybody*?"

"Well, I'm very sorry," answered Edith, "but I don't see how I can shut myself completely off from the society of other men on that account. If you feel like that, it seems to me that the only thing for us to do is to try not to see each other any more!"

Her manner as she said this softened a little, and Fred, partially conquered, but still resentful, tried to take advantage of it. His mouth closed tightly and answering, "Do you mean that?" he half-turned toward the door.

Edith, with a gesture signifying fatigue and exasperation, sank into a chair and picked up a book which she did n't open.

"Please, please go away!" she exclaimed fretfully. "This kind of thing is too exhausting! I can't stand it! You simply tire me out!" She rested an elbow on the table and shaded her eyes with her hand.

Whereupon Fred, fearing that she was going to cry and full of compunction, drew another chair close beside her and sitting down quickly said earnestly —

But why go on with the kind of dialogue every one is familiar with and which, probably, every reader of this book has taken part in? The outcome was a reconciliation. Edith laid down conditions, Fred accepted them because he had to, and for a time everything was lovely.

That afternoon Edith had another encounter, this time with Charles, a very brief one. Charles coming down the street had been riled by seeing — at a distance — Fred leaving the house. He let himself in, went upstairs, and met Edith in the hall. Ill-temper gave him courage.

"I saw that mucker going out just now," he exclaimed irritably; "how much longer are you going to make a fool of yourself with *him*?"

Edith *was* tired, and irritable, too, Fred had stayed so long after their reconciliation; therefore, instead of dousing him with sweetish sarcasm as she usually did, she simply looked at him for a moment without answering him, with a kind of fearful, blazing scorn, and then, turning into her own room, slammed the door so violently that Charles was quite frightened, and tiptoeing to his, shut himself in very softly.

Peter walked home from his interview with Edith tremendously uplifted.

It had been snowing heavily the day before, but now the sun was just setting amid great cushions of clouds with a dark-blue sky above. The sidewalks had been cleared, and the snow piled up in heaps showed dirtily white at intervals, but in the roadways it still lay thickly worked by the traffic whose movements it muffled into a granular, grayish, incohesive composition, continually rutted and re-rutted by passing wheels.

Peter crossed to Fifth Avenue and — the Penfield house being in the Murray Hill quarter — turned up it. Just ahead he saw Vera and, hastening his steps, overtook her. He had not seen her since his first encounter with Fred, and he began telling her of it and Fred's annoyance at him for having given the stranger his address, and of his warning to Peter to keep away from Mrs. Richmond.

"Of course, I can't do that!" — and Peter went on, "I'm afraid that poor Mrs. Richmond is letting herself in for trouble."

"Why?" asked Vera.

"I think," answered Peter, "that Filbert's in love with her. I as much as told her so to-day!" Peter mentioned this fact with a good deal of quiet pride.

Vera laughed rather grimly, Peter thought.

"Well, you'll be too if you don't look out!" she replied shortly.

"What nonsense!" said Peter.

"And as for Mrs. Richmond," Vera added, "don't worry about her. She's quite able to take care of herself."

This statement rather offended Peter, and he walked for some time without speaking, but at last he said:

"Do you mean by that you think that Mrs. Richmond is a flirt?"

Vera laughed again, this time with real heartiness.

"*Think* she's a flirt! Oh, Peter, what a child you are!"

"Really!" replied Peter stiffly. The epithet "child" was certainly a strange one to apply to a professional handler of psychological subtleties. "I am sure that my opinion of Mrs. Richmond is just as likely to be right as any one else's!"

"What *is* your opinion of her, Peter?"

Vera looked at Peter as she said this with a gleam of amusement — so Peter read it — in her eyes which rather abashed him, but he answered doggedly:

"I think she's a tremendously fine woman. She's been kind to Filbert simply because she felt that his talent — if you want to call it that — needed new experiences, new environments in order to broaden and develop it."

"How do you know she did? Did she tell you?"

"I'm not going to answer you, Vera," replied Peter — they had been calling each other by their first names for a good while now — "because I'm sure you would

misinterpret anything Mrs. Richmond might say or do. I'm sure I can't understand why!"

"I don't mind telling you why," replied Vera. "Edith Richmond and I lived in the same house for a good many years, and I think I know her pretty well, and if I were you I would n't go there quite so often."

"I'm very sorry that I can't agree with you!" said Peter with dignity.

"So am I!" answered Vera; "and as we can't agree, suppose we drop the subject!"

They went on, either in silence or talking constrainedly about casual things, until, on their reaching the Kilkenny, Vera suddenly darted ahead and with an abrupt good-night ran upstairs and disappeared.

Peter mounted slowly after her, wounded and angry. He had hoped to spend his evening with Vera, but her evident displeasure made that impossible.

As he reached the landing the sound of a piano came from Dora's apartment. Max was in there playing — there was no mistaking Max's touch — and Peter rang the bell. Rose opened the door presently, and a pleasant wave of warm air met him coming from Dora's parlor and bearing with it, in addition to Max's measures, the sound of laughing voices and the fragrant smell of tobacco smoke. He looked in. Dora, Muriel, Millicent, Max, and Tim were seated there, Dora and Millicent by the fire, Max as usual on the piano stool, and Tim and Muriel holding hands on the sofa. They raised a little shout of welcome. Millicent had just telephoned up to

see if he would dine with them. In case he could not go, she said they had intended to ask Ted, but no one had answered the telephone. They were going Dutch, each for himself. Peter, a little unhappy at his parting with Vera, suggested their getting the Wildwoods, too, but they had already been asked and were having an early dinner with the theatre afterwards. Peter asked where he should join them and when.

"Don't go away," said Dora; "we were just going to have a cocktail. We'll start in half an hour. Nobody's going to dress, so sit down and be comfortable!"

Peter hesitated as he looked at her, at her modish dress, her shining, meticulous hair, her robust figure, and beautiful features, grave at that moment in repose. The wish suddenly rose in him to know something definite, something true about that enigmatic nature. An explanation, a baring of the soul by those perfect lips would have something absorbingly dramatic about it, but now their invitation held forth only the prospect of an idle dawdling over drinks, coffee, and cigarettes. The night before he might have gone eagerly, but to-night the savor of it was gone. He still stood doubtfully. His quarrel with Vera had upset everything.

"What's the matter, Peter, dear? Working too hard?" Millicent had risen and with shining eyes above her rouged cheeks was smiling at him half-pitifully as much as to say, "Don't you *want* to come?" She still looked at him, and, as if to lure him to her, began to keep time to Max's music, doing a few inimitably grace-

ful and eccentric steps. Peter watched her charmed, but despondent.

"Wait a moment!" he cried, and hurried out of the room. Upstairs he found Ted, who had just come in.

"Look here, Ted, they want a sixth for dinner down at Miss St. David's! They want one of us. I can't go. Tell 'em I'm not feeling well, will you, and go yourself instead. I really don't feel up to it."

"All right," replied Ted; "but what's the matter. *Are n't* you well?"

"Yes, but, damn it all," cried Peter, "how am I ever to get anywhere going on like this! If a man wants to waste his time, everybody around him seems ready to help him. Well," he added more quietly, "it's my own fault. Will you go, Ted?"

"Dress?" asked Ted.

"No, just as you are; they're waiting."

Ted washed his hands, brushed his hair, and hurried away.

Peter listened, and presently the sound of voices and laughter from below indicated that Dora and the others were departing. After a moment silence ensued. Peter closed and locked the door, drew the curtains, poked the fire, and sat down. It was still and warm in the sitting-room, and Peter sat motionless waiting for this stillness and warmth to soothe his fretted nerves.

"The world, the flesh, and the devil!" thought Peter. "I must keep away from all that. If I am to do what I want to do I must lead my own life detached and calm!"

He got up, filled his pipe, and lighted it.

"If I am to write of life, I must detach myself from it. That is the only way. Observe and transcribe!"

After a time he got out his neglected manuscript and began reading it. The quiet and the sense of secure isolation began to efface the painful thoughts roused by his slight quarrel with Vera, her ungenerous words about Mrs. Richmond, and the temptation for pleasant idlings with Millicent.

Peter read and read, and presently, coming to the end of it, he sat down and began to write. The cakes and sandwiches which he had consumed at Mrs. Richmond's had obliterated any appetite he might have had for dinner, and, unconscious of the passage of time, he worked steadily hour after hour until he was interrupted by the sound of a knock on the outer door. He remembered then that he had locked it and, getting up, went to it, expecting to find Ted, but as he opened it Millicent Blomfield stepped in quickly and pushing past him made her way into the sitting-room. Peter, surprised, closed the door and followed her, looking at his watch. It was nine o'clock. He concluded that they had returned and that Millicent had come to ask him to join them, but something unusual in her look and demeanor made him vaguely uneasy. He followed her into the sitting-room where he found her standing by the fireplace. A foot rested on the fender and she was looking down at the small flames.

"Back already?" Peter asked.

"I am," she answered shortly, looking up and then down again.

"Where are the others?" Peter demanded.

"At the restaurant they — they —"

"Do they want me to join them? Because —"

"No, they don't. I came home because I was tired."

"*You* tired, Millicent! What *is* the matter?"

To Peter's horror and compunction he saw that her lips had begun to quiver. She clinched her hands as if with a strong effort at self-control, half-raised them and then dropped them again at her sides.

"What is it, Millicent; what has happened?"

"I'm tired of it all!"

"Of what?"

"Of my life!" she answered fiercely. "Don't you understand? How would *you* like it if you had what I've had all my life with nothing different to look forward to!"

"But I thought you liked it. I thought you were proud of what you've done; as you should be."

"Oh, I like it, but what am I? A stage dancer. When the 'Spyglass' is taken off, I'll be looking for another job. I'll get one probably because we've made a hit, but the next time perhaps I won't, unless I want to let one of the Jew managers keep me. In a few seasons I'll be too old. Who ever heard of an old dancer —" Millicent came to a halt suddenly. "Well, I guess I'd better stop! I'm no quitter!" she added after a moment.

"You're doing what we're all doing, Millicent," an-

swered Peter; "trying to climb out of our present lives into something closer to our ideal of what we would like life to be. History is full of people who, starting from the most unlikely beginnings, have made the most extraordinary successes of life, and I really do believe that almost anybody can do it too, and that just as sure as fate, you and I and everybody will sooner or later be given their opportunity."

"It won't be given to me! Do you know where my life began and where it will end? On Broadway! There's no getting out of it. I don't know anything but Broadway, never until lately knew that there *was* anything but Broadway, am only good for Broadway, and although I hate it, will never never be able to get away from it as long as I live!"

"Millicent!"

In his concern at the evident despondency of her mood, Peter stepped toward her quickly, but, putting out her hand as if to keep him away from her, she threw herself into a corner of the sofa and covering her face with her hands began to cry, not loudly, but with a despairing note, an abandoned pathos of hopelessness which sounded very terrible to him.

"Millicent! Please, please don't cry!" And sitting down close beside her he placed his hand lightly on her shoulder, not knowing what to do. She was wearing one of those dashing costumes for which the Blomfield sisters were famous. Almost below him the nape of her white neck showed, from which rose her curling blond

hair, rising in symmetrical waves and disappearing in shining ripples under the brim of her small hat. Her white shoulder was close to him, and following its rounded curves he saw the firm and beautiful outlines of her neck and bosom slip into her corsage. There was something exotically fascinating about the perfume she exhaled and the daring make-up of her cheeks and eyes, and Peter's heart began to beat as he put his arm across her shoulders and drew her toward him. Suddenly she turned and buried her face against his coat.

"Oh, Peter, I'm so miserable!"

She seemed to lean on him still more heavily, a bewildering burden, and Peter suddenly began straining her to him. Poor, beautiful, strong, helpless creature. Peter held her closer and yet closer, and Millicent, grasping the lapels of his coat, raised her head, looked at him for a moment, and then dropped it again, and in that glance lay unmistakable surrender.

Peter's head whirled, mad thoughts raced through it. She was his for the taking, but behind the surge of his passions stood the thought, immovable as a threat, that if he took her he must keep her. No taking and throwing away again afterwards! Something inherent in her nature made a demand on Peter's honesty which even at this fierce moment he could not disregard. Therefore, while yielding to the current he fought to keep himself from being swept away by it.

He must hold out a hand saying, "Take mine for good or evil, for better or for worse!" or he must inexor-

ably end the present situation. These alternatives passed swiftly through his mind. She was unhappy, hopeless, and with reason, perhaps; had lived a life of hard struggle against unclean and sordid forces. Should he lift her out of all that? Open out for her new windows into the world?

His pity for her urged him to, and yet he asked himself, was it in his power? What must be the bonds between them to make it possible and what *might* they be? And as if to place this question squarely before him and to force an answer, Millicent all at once, lifting herself, clasped him with her arms and with a quick movement sought his lips with hers. Something gave Peter a sudden mastery over himself. He did not evade her. He still held her, but his words came in a torrent of entreaty:

"Listen, Millicent, this is n't the way! It is n't! It is n't! We're fools! You're not happy. You want to advance, to rise! So do I. We'll never do it by eating the lotus! That's weakness, and we're going to be strong! That's what I've always wondered at and envied in you, your strength; you've helped to make me strong at times, too. Look here, we're going to be friends as we never were before. Alpine climbers fastened together to scale the summits!"

Peter, sure of himself now, sprang to his feet. She sighed deeply and lay for a time inert and pale, her face turned to the fire. Presently she got up, and without looking toward him moved toward the door.

"Good-night, Peter!"

She still avoided his eyes, walking with an air of profound dejection which moved him almost intolerably.

"Ah! Millicent, don't!" he exclaimed; "you make me so unhappy!"

"Don't worry about me! That was true, I suppose — what you said, but —" she hesitated for a moment. "Good-night, Peter!"

"No, no, Millicent! Wait!" Peter held out his arms and rushed toward her. The door closed on her. He opened it and hurried out. From below him on the stairs she made a gesture which seemed to say farewell to him and to bid him to return, and at that moment the street door opened and a burst of voices and of laughter arose from below.

CHAPTER XXI

PETER's encounter with Millicent that night made him unhappy, flattered his pride a little, and strengthened him in the opinion that his rôle in the future must be that of a detached, benevolent observer watching calmly at a distance — and recording — the complicated attributes which go to make up human character, but after a few days of tremendous effort on his book he began to reconsider his determination, and, arriving at the conclusion that it was much too revolutionary, decided on a division of his day into certain allotments of work and play. He must be fair, he felt, not only to himself, but to others. For instance, what possible reason could there be for not going to see Mrs. Richmond occasionally, beyond Vera's prejudiced statements? He would, by stopping his visits there, not only reveal himself as a rude person, but deprive himself of a friend more truly helpful than any other. There was no more real reason for avoiding Mrs. Richmond than Vera herself. They were simply good friends, and not to see her occasionally during his moments of leisure — and he could n't be working all the time — would seem like a bit of silly affectation. He must see to it that his work came first and allow the rest of his life to arrange itself in orderly and natural sequence.

He followed this plan and found that it worked well.

He saw as much of Vera — they had by some unspoken understanding agreed to forget their quarrel — and Edith as he had before, and that portion of his time which, during the past month he had been trying to kill, he now devoted determinedly to labor.

But he was unhappy about Millicent. Once or twice meeting her on the stairs she greeted him as usual, but with a manner no longer dashing. Vera one night, when he and Max Bebel were there, told them about Tim Richmond and Muriel. Muriel, thinking on account of Tim's youth that he would prove an easy victim, had determined some time before to marry him, but Tim was more wary than any one could have imagined. Millicent had told Vera about it. Muriel, playing the game of meeting Tim more than halfway, with the hope that she could inveigle him the rest of it, was finding that it was n't easy, and was going about with him at all hours to the detriment of her work. On one occasion she had n't appeared at the theatre at all, and Millicent had gone on alone. Managers, of course, would n't stand that sort of thing, and if Millicent had to break away from her it would make it more difficult for each of them to get engagements.

"It's too bad!" exclaimed Vera. "Millicent is a good, capable girl. She ought to marry. She'd make a splendid wife for some one!"

"Do you zink so?" Max asked with a far-away look in his eyes.

"Yes, I do, and how it is you have n't fallen in love

with her, Max Bebel, I don't understand. You've lost your heart to all sorts of queer people about here and never given a thought to the best and the handsomest woman in the block, with the exception, perhaps, of Dora St. David!"

"She would never look at me!" answered Max, and Peter could n't help thinking that Max was right.

Peter worked steadily at his book, finished it in time, and sent it to his publishers. Another period of idleness ensued while waiting their decision. After keeping it for two months, they returned it. Peter took it with him and called on another publisher. This publisher knew at once, after learning that he had already had one book published, that it must have been a failure. As almost all publishers' contracts give the publisher the first opportunity to refuse or accept the author's second book, it seemed probable — as Peter was offering it to him — that Peter's first publishers had refused it. Therefore, although he immediately agreed to consider it, he was already prejudiced against it.

While Peter was finishing *his* book, and while Fred Filbert was still patching, pulling, nailing, and sawing away at his, a rumor began to circulate through the Kilkenny that Dora St. David was writing a book, too. This rumor had been growing for some time. People had heard a typewriting machine clicking industriously almost every morning for many weeks, and an early caller or two had seen Dora hastily putting away sheets of what looked like typewritten manuscript. Finally a defi-

nite confirmation of these rumors passed like lightning through the house. One of the fourth floor back young ladies, going into Dora's flat early one morning to borrow some hairpins, saw lying on Dora's parlor table a pile of typewritten sheets at least two inches thick. Dora was n't up, and while Rose was getting the hairpins for her she could n't help seeing what was written on the top page. It was

PANSY

A Novel

By _____

"Do you know!" announced Uncle John Wildwood to Vera one morning not long after, "the strangest thing has happened. Do you remember hearing a little while ago that Dora St. David had written a novel called 'Pansy'? Well" — and he held up a bundle of manuscript — "here is a novel sent over by the firm last night and it has that identical name! It must be Dora's!"

"Somebody else may have thought of that name too," answered Vera.

"Somebody else might have *thought* of it," answered Uncle John, "but I'm sure there are not two people in the world who would decide to *use* a title so utterly insane. I'm surprised at Dora St. David. Besides this is without the author's name, just as Miss What's-her-name said Dora St. David's was."

"Well, don't decide against it until you've read it," said Vera.

"Certainly *not*! In fact I'll stretch a point."

It was Sunday morning. Breakfast was over, Vera had sat down to glance through the morning paper and Uncle John had already tackled "Pansy."

After reading restlessly for half an hour he suddenly hurled the handful of manuscript he was holding into the air.

"Of all the —! I can't advise them to accept *this*!"

"Why not?" asked Vera.

"Why? Because it's so childish, so immature. I feel as if some infant of six were asking me to take her intellectual attainments seriously. I *am* surprised at Dora St. David! Now that shows how writers may differ from their books."

"I remember your saying exactly the opposite one day when we were lunching with Ted and Peter Watergate."

"Did I? Well, anyhow, this is impossible!"

He gathered up the manuscript again with Vera's help and started once more.

"I've got to read it, I suppose. Perhaps it will improve as it goes on. I'd hate to have to advise against its publication."

He read faithfully until he had finished it, taking the entire day.

"I can't recommend it, Vera. What shall I do?"

"Can't you tell her what's wrong with it?"

"It's all wrong! Its outlook. Its sentimentality. Its lack of knowledge. That's the peculiar thing about it. Dora St. David has lived and suffered, but to judge from this book difficulties, doubts, and sorrows have not made the slightest imprint on her character. I don't mean to say that it might not please a lot of old ladies who don't care about real life, and who like a literary diet of molasses, sugar, and honey all mixed up together, but *I* can't give it serious consideration."

"Well, don't, then!" replied Vera shortly.

Uncle John returned "Pansy" with a note advising the firm against its publication.

This note found Charles in his usual quandary. Uncle John's verdict was the seventh which had already been handed in, three, including Uncle John, in favor of its rejection, four recommending its acceptance. If it had been the other way about, Charles would without doubt have returned it immediately, but according to custom — being now quite undecided what course to take — he began passing it around among the staff. Luckily for Dora St. David, the manuscript happened to be handed one after the other to the three young lady telephone operators, each of whom recommended it so enthusiastically that Charles decided to accept it.

Although the novel was to be published anonymously, the firm, of course, knew the name and address of the lady who had submitted it, but as she never called on them and as such correspondence with her as the business demanded had been carried on by one of

Charles's underlings, Charles had no reason for associating Dora St. David with "Pansy" which, incidentally, was to make its appearance in the coming autumn list of Richmond Sons & Richmond.

Spring had arrived now, and as summer dragged its torrid course the city changed, grew languid, became less hard and flashing, turned gipsy, lived out of doors, and spread itself indolently in the dusk under the street-lamps through the dusty streets and in the open spaces.

At the Kilkenny, whose inmates knew how to make the most of every season, windows were thrown open and young ladies and young men were seen sitting at them. In place of the muffs and furs of winter, summery gowns fluttered on the stairways; instead of running, the young ladies of the fourth floor back now strolled leisurely in and out; masculine straw hats — purchased from adjacent Sixth Avenue haberdashers at a dollar ninety-eight — appeared promptly on the date sanctioned by the newspapers for this transformation. Everybody lounged about rejoicing in the warmth and sunshine. Everybody seemed to have a little more money, and if they had n't, it was n't half as hard, being hard-up in summer somehow as in winter.

This was the season beloved of Sid Smallshaw. Sid never did cotton to overcoats. He liked weather where one could saunter gloriously in unhidden sartorial splendor. Every evening now Sid would wander forth, either in his light check suit or in a new one he had recently

purchased made up of a white flannel with narrow purple stripes. Sid had bought the material of a sailor who claimed to have purchased it in Scotland. Almost every evening Sid strolled on Sixth Avenue, stopping now and then to talk with friends, or if to his delight he met by chance one of the ladies of the Kilkenny, to remove his hat, saying in his mellow darky voice and showing two rows of white teeth, "Good-evenin', Mis' Vera," or, "Good-evenin', Mis' Millicent."

Rose often walked out with him and — as they sauntered with their inimitable darky swing up and down the Avenue — it was acknowledged by everybody, except the cheap, no-account, light-colored Northern coons who frequented its saloons and pool-rooms — race-track hangers-on, cheap touts and gamblers — that they were a handsome couple.

The sailor who had sold Sid the flannel had sworn that it was the only piece of its kind in North America, and Sid had firmly believed him until, to his consternation, he had seen a windowful of ladies' dresses in Sixth Avenue made of the identical stuff. It was on a Saturday, the very day on which Sid's new suit had been sent in by his tailor, and he had been planning in Rose's company to take the Avenue by storm and incidentally rout two or three gentlemen who were making up to her. Sid was so depressed by this evidence of duplicity on the part of the sailor, and by the realization of the fact that in the very centre of their promenade a windowful of ladies' suits waited to prove that

he, Sid, was nothing but a plagiarist, that he determined to wear his old light check one instead.

Rose, coming downstairs to find out whether Sid had seen anything of a chicken she had purchased that morning for Mis' Dora's Sunday dinner, saw Sid's new suit hung on a chair. Sid had already shown her the material and she had waited with almost Sid's impatience to see what it looked like made up.

"My!" exclaimed Rose, "that's handsome!" And then, noticing no responding gleam in Sid's eyes, she added, "Doan yew think so?"

"I doan know," answered Sid. "That sailor sole it to me foh somethin' diff'ent. It ain' diff'ent when yo see a whole window full of it."

"What yoh mean?" Rose demanded.

"Levy's got a window full of ladies' suits of it. I ain' got the face to wear it. Some of those cheap niggers 'll make fun of me! They 'll say I'm wearin' ladies' cloth!"

Rose did n't answer, but the next afternoon, when Sid came up for her dressed in his second best, she met him at the door with —

"Where's yoh new suit?"

"I tole you," answered Sid. "I cyan't wear it."

"Yoh got to," said Rose. "Yoh go down an' put it on while I'm gettin' ready!"

Sid with a sigh went slowly down and got into it reluctantly. He did n't know what had got into Rose to order him about like that all of a sudden. She'd never done it before. He crawled upstairs dejectedly and Rose

let him in once more, and as the light from the kitchen window fell on her the gloom resting on his features was gradually dispelled by a widening smile of joy and appreciation. Rose was wearing one of the suits he had seen in Levy's window. She had gone as soon as Sid had told her and purchased one.

It dawned gradually on Sid, with a growing sense of admiration, that she had retrieved the situation completely. Had turned defeat into victory. Let those Sixth Avenue niggers see the window now if they wanted to. Even they would have to admit the intrinsic beauty of the fabric itself, and this admission, coupled with the realization that they could never have conceived so brilliant a stroke themselves, would strike them speechless.

And it did. Sid and Rose scored an immense success. The Sixth Avenue darkies stared in open-mouthed wonder and reluctant admiration, and that day was started a fashion which is still in vogue in darkydom.

Everybody in the Kilkenny stopped in town all summer, with one or two exceptions, and liked it. Wadham Robinson managed by hook or crook to get an invitation to spend a couple of week-ends in the country, and, after borrowing Max Bebel's only pair of silk socks and a waistcoat from Ted, went off in high feather. Vera and her father spent Vera's vacation out of town, but the rest of the tenants stayed where they were with no thought of going anywhere else. That is, except Peter and Ted, who might have visited distant relatives in

New England — neither of them having near ones — but did n't want to.

In two months Peter's novel was returned by the second publisher, declined with thanks. He had been idle now since its completion and it was still on his hands. He started it off again and began work on another. He had begun to realize that to make a living by writing was an uphill game. Ted, figuring *his* progress, announced that during the eight months which had elapsed since he had landed in New York the only thing accomplished toward laying the foundations of *his* literary reputation had been the acceptance and publication of one sonnet by a magazine whose editor was a friend of his and for which he had received the sum of ten dollars; about enough to pay for postage on a stream of his efforts which were constantly going out and coming back again, and the expense he had incurred in taking the said editor out to luncheon. But Ted was a model of philosophic cheerfulness and kept pegging away doggedly in spite of every disappointment.

One day Fred appeared at the Kilkenny to call on Dora, but Dora was not at home.

While Charles had had no occasion to associate the Miss St. David of the Kilkenny with the author of "Pansy," yet Tim knew all about it, having been told by Muriel, and meeting Fred one day he told *him*.

"I never thought *she* could write a book!" exclaimed Fred.

"Well, she has, and we're going to publish it."

Fred went home immediately and started on his again, with renewed vigor. The thing was getting to be a nightmare with him.

The Richmonds — Charles and Edith — had taken a house for the summer, as their custom was, within easy distance of New York — old Mr. Penfield and the rest of the family remaining in town — and although Fred had spent a number of week-ends there, and although Edith met him in town occasionally for luncheon, his time was not nearly so much occupied as it had been in the winter, and in consequence he had begun to think once more that, perhaps, he had been a little lacking in sound judgment in turning Dora down completely. She had given him suggestions once or twice which had been of value. He might go around there and make it up with her. Find out, too, about the book Tim had said she had written. He could n't exactly believe it, and yet wondered if she had stolen any of his thunder.

Rose announced that Mis' Dora was out, and Fred, replying that he would wait awhile, walked into the parlor and sat down. On Dora's small desk he saw a sheet of Richmond Sons & Richmond's well-known business paper. It was a communication stating that they were enclosing two copies of a contract for the publication of Miss St. David's novel entitled "Pansy."

So it was true. Looking down even from the dizzy heights of his own position, Fred could n't help admitting that Dora had increased in stature, but he *was* surprised. Of course, she would n't make any money out of

it, but — then as Fred knew it was no small task even to write a book — whether successful or not — and he would n't have said that she had the requisite application — however, it did show Dora in a new light — not an unbecoming one either.

Fred waited awhile engaging Rose in jocular conversation — to Rose's surprise and misgiving — and went away saying that he would call again in a day or two.

When Dora heard of Fred's call she was glad. A feeling of elation welled up. He was coming back. Fred still seemed to her the one agent, the one guide through whom she might find her way out, and while not blind to certain traits which he had revealed to her, she believed in him sufficiently to have faced the future with him, especially as it would mean a deliverance from the equivocal life she had led for so long.

Fred called again, and after that more and more often, and the Kilkenny for Dora's sake greeted him as cordially as it could manage, even Peter trying to forget his insulting behavior on a previous occasion.

While Fred saw Mrs. Richmond during the summer, Peter did not. The kind of innocent dalliance which the latter represented was all very well, Edith thought, if it did n't put one to too much trouble — in the winter, for instance, when everybody lived handily together, but in summertime it called for a little too much planning for what you got out of it, so Peter saw nothing of her and spent just so much more time in Vera's company. The attractions of three feminine person-

alities had been working on Peter's nature, Edith's the most potently.

Millicent's had for a time, but Peter had had sense enough to realize the danger lying in that direction for both of them, and so had managed to steer clear of it. That any possible danger could threaten from his intimacy with Edith, he would never have admitted for a moment, and yet in his friendship with her — a friendship with a married woman always bordering on the sentimental yet never quite touching it — there were elements more stirring than in Vera's frank comradeship. However, as Peter was almost as eager to fall in love as Max Bebel, the slight personal note which had appeared when he had first known her — now that Edith was out of the way — began to sound once more.

Summer passed slowly, as it always does in New York, but to the inmates of the Kilkenny, mostly young, vigorous, and impervious to the extremes of any season, it was simply a period offering different methods of relaxation from those of winter, all of which must be tested with as much zeal as if it had never visited the metropolis before.

In these experiments Dora and Fred took part — Fred going out of his way to be agreeable to everybody — Peter and Vera — Max Bebel and Millicent — occasionally Muriel and Tim Richmond, and last of all, Ted, and perhaps Uncle John. When it was hot Uncle John noticed it, and stayed indoors. The others did n't seem to mind.

For a city whose climate for six months in the year verges on the tropical the suburbs of New York are wretchedly provided with opportunities for out-of-door recreation, particularly for people who are neither rich nor poor. To be sure, there is Coney, and the Kilkennyites, being mostly young, got a good deal of fun out of it, until the ladies grew tired of being squeezed, pulled about, and jostled by the crowds, after which they did n't go any more. This may have been due principally to Dora, because one night Fred, thinking of former days, had tried a little love-making on the beach, which had suddenly roused again in her that loathing she had felt before, had caused her to join the others hastily, made her unhappy, and had sent her to bed that night under a cloud of discouragement, doubting whether even if the chance came she could, after all, seek deliverance through Fred's aid, but the next day, in spite of this, she began again to make allowances, in her thoughts she still clung to him, and through her faith in him, still hoped.

After they had decided to cut Coney out of their list of amusements, they kept mostly to the city itself. To the Park, Riverside, the roof-gardens, and under the spell of this warm and sleepy life, of music, of the open windows of restaurants, through which came the heated air of the streets, or the smell of wet asphalt after sudden summer showers, of the globes of light illuminating the traffic or shining through leafage, of the dust and noise of Broadway with its gallery of tireless giants per-

forming their preposterous antics, each couple seemed to become more closely welded together until, if Ted were with them, without Uncle John to keep him company, he felt very much out of it. Fred and Peter were so well content that if Edith had known it she would have been extremely discontented. Tim Richmond and Muriel seemed to be living in a state of armed dalliance where for the moment each had agreed not to ask too much of the other, and, to everybody's satisfaction, Millicent was treating Max, who — since Vera put it into his head — had promptly fallen in love with her — quite nicely.

Peter's second book kept coming back from one publisher after another until there were n't any more to send it to excepting Richmond Sons & Richmond. He felt reluctant to send it to them for a number of reasons, and when on his list theirs was the only untried name, he put it sadly away in his trunk, hoping for better luck with the next one. He had avoided telling Vera his tale of unbroken rejections, partly through pride and partly because of her relation to the house of Richmond, but one day she asked him point-blank whether he had found a publisher for it. Peter answered that he had n't.

"Who have you tried?"

"I've tried them all!"

"What a shame. Charles's firm too?"

"No, not Richmond. But everybody else!"

"Why did n't you try them?"

There were so many reasons why he had n't — principally his distaste of asking favors, and if he submitted

it to them it might be construed in that way — that he hesitated, but Vera, who understood, did n't wait for an answer.

"Have you got the manuscript now?"

Peter answered that he had.

"Will you let me have it for a few days?"

"Of course. But what do you want it for?"

"Don't ask me; I may tell you a little later."

Peter got the manuscript and gave it to Vera, who took it that night to Uncle George. Uncle George, a tall, frigid old man with white hair, moustaches, and beard, had told her in response to her enquiry on the telephone that he could give her half an hour if she got there not later than seven. Uncle George occupied an apartment in which were arranged his collections of Eastern art. He considered himself a connoisseur, but he was a very bad one, and the effect of his labors produced only an impression of expensive banality.

Uncle George aimed at being considered a very elegant creature. He was a shrewd, cold-blooded old man, but this ambition had always appealed to him more strongly than any other. If Charles was immaculate, Uncle George was the pattern of cold perfection. Vera found him in his library, which was crammed with Japanese junk, standing in front of his fire. He was in evening dress, so obtrusively feckless that Vera wondered how an old man could spend so much time over such trifles.

Uncle George's collar and shirt-front were so white, so smooth, so stiff, that they seemed to be constructed

not of linen at all, but of some hard material finished to look like it. His lawn tie was tied with such rigid symmetry that it seemed not to be lawn, but some carefully simulated creation of *papier-maché*. His evening clothes, perfectly smooth, spotless, and unwrinkled, looked, not like cloth, but like some dense material from which a bullet would glance harmlessly, and his patent-leather boots seemed so immaculate, so lustrous, so unbendable and unbreakable, that one could not help wondering if they were not made of a varnished metal of some kind. Uncle George's shirt-studs and his cuff-links, which just showed below the ends of his coat sleeves, seemed to say, "Kindly notice how elegant we are!" and Uncle George seemed to be constantly saying so too.

Uncle George greeted Vera cordially, and proceeded to insert a cigarette into the end of his cigarette-holder, and in doing this he seemed to say, "These are extremely expensive, unusual, and elegant cigarettes, and this cigarette-holder I am about to use is an extremely expensive, unusual, and elegant cigarette-holder." He lighted his cigarette and sat down. Rather reluctantly, Vera thought, as if he feared that by doing so his trousers might become slightly creased.

"Sit down, Vera. What can I do for you?"

"I've got a book here I want you to publish, Uncle George," Vera announced, holding it aloft.

"But that's Charles's department —" began Uncle George.

Vera interrupted him.

"I know it is, Uncle George, but never mind about Charles. I want you to try an experiment."

She paused a moment, collecting language and ideas so as to express what she wanted to say as clearly and tersely as possible, and then went on:

"You probably know how Charles publishes his novels, but I'm going to tell you, anyway. He brings out perhaps ten novels every season. In each contract for each of these ten novels is a clause binding the writer to allow Richmond Sons & Richmond the first opportunity to accept or refuse his next. A small minority of these novels will be successful, the others won't. When the writers of the unsuccessful ones submit their second novels, they are rejected, and they are obliged to try to get some one else to take them, every firm knowing that they must have been previously declined by Richmond Sons & Richmond. In the meantime Charles is putting out a new batch by a new lot of authors hoping that one of them will prove to be a best-seller, but why he should issue the books by this new lot instead of the second efforts of the old neither Charles nor any one else can tell. They have an idea, perhaps, that because the first book did n't sell, the second won't either, but that has been disproved over and over again. Charles never knows whether a book is going to sell or not and never knows whether he ought to publish what he does publish or not. It's all a gamble!"

Uncle George laughed shortly and began examining his nails with great care.

"Now," Vera went on, "I want to ask you, as I have said, to try an experiment. The young man who wrote this book has already had one published which was n't a success, and his publisher has in consequence refused this one. Every other publisher in turn has refused it, too, except our firm. If it is sent to Charles, he will, if he does n't refuse it outright, send it to half a dozen readers, every reader adding to Charles's indecision as to what to do with it, the knowledge that it has been refused by the publisher of the first book probably in the end deciding him to return it."

"Excuse me!" Uncle George here broke in, and, jumping up, he seized a small clothes-brush and began carefully brushing off an ash which had fallen from his cigarette and rested on his waistcoat. He brushed quickly with every appearance of concern, taking, it seemed to Vera, an unnecessarily long time over it. Finally he sat down nervously, and, glancing at Vera, indicated that she was to proceed.

"All this," resumed Vera, — "the money paid to the readers who read it, and the time spent by Charles in trying to make up his mind, — will be expensive, so I am going to propose that you try something else. I want to ask you to take this book and publish it without asking anybody's opinion about it, without spending a penny on expert advice, without letting Charles try to make up his mind about it, and see what the result will be! Will you, Uncle George?"

Uncle George looked at Vera contemplatively out of

his hard old eyes, and then, getting up suddenly again, began to examine his whiskers in the mirror over the mantelpiece.

"But nobody ever publishes a book that way, Vera," he finally remarked. "It would practically mean that we should be throwing the money required to get it out into the gutter!"

"No more so than a great many books Charles publishes already," answered Vera.

"Well, that's true," admitted Uncle George. He hesitated. "What do you think of it?"

Vera laughed.

"Now, you see! You're asking my opinion about it already. It is a good book, Uncle George, and so was the first one, but individual opinions don't count. I really believe if publishers dispensed with them altogether and selected their novels by drawing lots, they would be just as successful with them."

"That's what Tim says," answered Uncle George reflectively.

"Does he?" exclaimed Vera. "Well, Tim's no fool."

Uncle George looked at his watch, got up, and examined the back of his trousers carefully. Then, noticing that his cuff-links had disappeared inside his coat-sleeves, he pulled them down carefully and touched a bell.

"I'll tell you what you do, Vera. Leave it here and I'll think it over."

"If I do that you'll be getting people to read it so that you can get opinions about it."

"No, I won't. Well, take it along if you like. I'll let you know in a day or two."

Vera had an idea that he was going to consult Tim.

"All right," she answered, "and good-bye!"

Uncle George's manservant had just come in with a hat and a light overcoat.

"Wait a moment," said Uncle George, "and I'll drop you somewhere near home."

He took the hat from the manservant, examined it carefully, took the coat, examined that, too, and then returned it to the manservant to hold for him, and as he thrust his arms into it with a self-conscious gesture Vera perceived that he had requested her to stay so that she might see that his hat, his overcoat, and his manservant were all extremely expensive, unusual, and elegant.

"What a vain, selfish, petty old man!" thought Vera after she had left him. "Not half as nice as Grandfather Penfield, for all his eccentric ways. What *is* the matter with the tribe of Richmond!"

CHAPTER XXII

It was only eight when Vera got back to the Kilkenny and she called up her grandfather and asked for Tim. Tim was n't there. She thought of the Lucullus and tried that. Tim happened to be at the Lucullus, and, as it was only across the street, came over as soon as he had finished his dinner. Vera told him about her call on Uncle George and the promise she had tried to extort from him.

"Will you help, Tim? I thought perhaps Uncle George might ask your advice about it."

"I know he will," answered Tim. "I'm getting to be some pumpkins in our firm, Vera!"

"Well, will you help?"

"Help! I'll see that Uncle George makes them take it. My word goes with Uncle George these days, Vera."

"How have you managed it, Tim? Uncle George has always seemed so impervious to anything and everything."

"Well, I've got ideas," answered Tim. "*You* might n't call them ideas, and perhaps they are n't anything very unusual, but such as they are they're ideas. Uncle George never has any himself or Charles or anybody else in the firm, so Uncle George thinks I'm pretty good. You know what ideas are in the publishing business? Just doing something different, whether it's rot-

ten or not. People will buy stuff because it's different from what they're used to. For instance, every book you've ever seen has been printed in black letters on a white ground, has n't it? Well, we're going to bring out 'Pansy' with white letters on a black ground! An idea of yours truly!" And Tim looked at Vera triumphantly.

Vera laughed.

"That won't make it sell, Tim!"

"It may kill the book, but it'll advertise *us* all right!" answered Tim.

"But that's horrid, Tim! To kill the chances of the book just to advertise yourselves!"

"It'll be a great ad for Dora St. David's second book, though, and we'll print that in the usual way. Say, Vera, do you know what I've been thinking about?"

"No!" replied Vera. "What?"

"I've been thinking about getting married."

"Tim! Who?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Not —!"

"Yes, Muriel!"

"Tim!" And Vera flushed.

"Well, what's the matter? You were angry with me the first time I told you that I was going to call on the Blomfields because you thought my intentions might not be honorable — perhaps they were n't, I don't know — and now you're angry because perhaps they are!"

"But, Tim, she's only a dancer!"

"Look here," answered Tim, "I thought you were

one of these new women who've chucked all the old prejudices overboard."

"But I'm afraid she won't make you happy!"

"What's being a dancer got to do with that?"

"Nothing, perhaps, but —"

"Well, what *is* your objection? Is it because she's a dancer or because you're afraid she'll make me unhappy? Be honest now!"

"Well, perhaps it was a little of both."

"She's crazy to get me!" remarked Tim reflectively.

"But, Tim, why don't you pick out some nice girl of your own class?"

Tim turned a pitying eye on Vera. "You're not a new woman yet, Vera. That sounded like Charles. No, thank you! Not for mine! No society bud for me! I want somebody who's had to work for a living, who knows what a dollar's worth, and who can appreciate a good thing when she's got it."

"But I've always thought Muriel was mercenary," said Vera.

"Well, if you mean by that that she knows what she wants, of course she is. So am I and you and all the rest of us."

Tim got up.

"I have n't quite made up my mind yet, so don't say anything about it, will you."

"It'll make an awful row in the family, Tim!"

"Not much it won't! They might like to make a row, but they won't. Know why? Because I'm the coming

man in Richmond Sons & Richmond and they know it." Tim paused. "And to prove it I'll have that book out in time for the fall season. Watergate wrote it, did he? Poor devil!"

"He's nothing of the kind!" retorted Vera indignantly, but Tim's only reply was a chuckle.

Two days after this the Wildwoods' doorbell rang violently and Peter appeared holding a letter in his hand. Vera happened to be alone. Peter's face was pale and agitated and, holding the letter out to Vera, he exclaimed:

"I don't understand this! Here's a letter from Richmond Sons & Richmond saying they've accepted my book! They've never even seen it!"

"Yes, they have, Peter. I gave it to them."

"But, Vera, I only gave you the manuscript day before yesterday."

"I know it, but they've taken it on my recommendation."

Such a look of relief, of joy, of the clearing-away of discouragement, crossed Peter's face that Vera's eyes grew moist.

"Oh, Vera!" was all he could say, and suddenly he sat down putting his hands to his face. After a moment he took them away, got up again, and exclaiming, "I'll never be able to pay you for doing that!" seized one of her hands and began kissing it.

"No, no, Peter; don't do that! I was glad to do it! You deserved it!"

"I'm not kissing your hand on that account," cried Peter deliriously. "I'm kissing it because I love you and have only just — I mean because I've loved you always, always, always —"

Vera looked at his bent head as he kneeled, leaning over her hand. "What a boy he is!" she thought tenderly. "What a queer, sensitive, helpless, hopeless boy!"

"Not always, Peter — not always!"

"Yes, for a long time I've wanted to ask you."

"But, Peter, you have n't any money!"

"I know; that was the trouble. I have a little, but not enough, but now that my second book is accepted —!"

Vera laughed delightfully and took his head in her hands. "Oh, Peter, you child." If she wanted him he was hers! How wonderful it seemed!

"Will you?" demanded Peter. "Don't you care for me? I thought perhaps you might a little."

"But I do, Peter! Oh, ever so much! But we must wait!"

"How long, Vera?"

"That depends on you."

"I've courage enough for anything now. Don't you remember how your praise of my first book encouraged me? I've never forgotten those words, Vera, and they've always given you, somehow, a special significance, made me feel toward you in some way different from any one else. Think what courage I'll have now. I think I needed just that impetus to make the difference between success or failure."

"No, Peter, don't say that; you would have succeeded anyway."

"Perhaps! But now it will come so much more quickly."

They sat in the dusk of October with the sounds of the streets coming in through open windows. A kiss sealed their compact — more than one.

"I'll wait, Peter," said Vera, "but it must be our secret. We can tell them when the time comes, and that depends on you."

"You mean my success!" said Peter.

"Yes," answered Vera, but she meant other things too.

Tim belonged to a little yacht club on the river, down a steep slope from the Drive, and they were going that night to dine there at Tim's invitation. Dora, the Blomfields, Vera and her father, Peter, Ted, and Max. Fred was doing something else and could n't come.

They met at Dora's according to custom and, climbing to the top of a West-Side bus, descended on the Drive and took one of the paths winding down the hill. Presently they came to a bridge spanning the railway tracks, crossed it, entered the little clubhouse from it, into the second story, went down a flight of steps, and came out on to a level lawn where tables were placed close to the brimming expanse of the broad river.

That was a quietly happy evening — something subdued them, even Tim and Muriel, who could be boisterous. Nature, which one forgets in cities, suddenly

showed herself, and laying a soothing hand on them said, "Look!" The river widening in the distance above and below gradually melted into a void of darkness, the dim bulks of anchored vessels loomed close in to shore, others passed sounding, at intervals, deep-toned harbor whistles, the Palisades opposite rose indistinctly, and lights shone on the river, green, red, and yellow, with the stars above. As they sat there, there came floating down from the north on the breast of the river, out of the darkness, a sudden gust of cold air. It swept over them causing Uncle John to shiver.

"The end of summer!" he said, and turned up the collar of his coat.

After they had finished and the men were smoking their cigars, Millicent joined Vera and they walked together up and down the narrow path which ran close to the landing-stage.

"Yes, the summer is at an end, Millicent," said Vera. "Are you glad?"

A kind of excitement seemed to be gleaming in Millicent's eyes.

"Listen," she said without answering Vera's question. "You thought for a while that Peter had lost his head about me, did n't you?"

"I don't think I thought about it at all, Millicent," answered Vera with sudden reserve.

"Yes, you did; that's what you thought, but it was n't true! It was my fault. I thought I was stuck on him and I tried to make him like me. He was so different

from the rough-necks I'd been thrown with all my life. But it was no use. He knew it would n't do. And I see it now, Vera. Do you know why I'm telling you this? Because there's something between you and him. Don't say anything about it if you don't want to, but what I've said I felt I must."

And so Millicent made her renunciation, calling attention to that which she wished to conceal, as woman is often prone to do, and telling her lie which, after all, only another woman would have believed.

They had reached the end of the walk, and suddenly Millicent put her arms around Vera and hugged her with such warmth that the latter was nearly stifled. "There!" she cried, and brushing her eyes quickly with her handkerchief she gave a little hysterical laugh. "But, Vera, is n't he queer?"

"Peter?" asked Vera.

"Yes!"

"Very, very queer, Millicent — and he'll never change!"

"But he's talented, Vera; he can't be like other people. And you can depend on him, Vera."

"Yes," said Vera, "I think you can."

"I know you can; and now, Vera, I want to tell you something else. Max wants me to marry him." Here she laughed again even more hysterically than before. "After falling in love with every one in the block he's fallen in love with me!"

"Oh, but he's a dear good fellow, Millicent! A man's

falling in love the way Max has been doing does n't mean anything."

"Do you really think so, Vera?"

"I know it. Max is pure gold. He's lonely, that's all." And at those words Millicent threw her arms around Vera once more, laid her head on her shoulder, and began to cry, saying between her sobs:

"So am I, Vera! Oh, so am I!"

"There! there!" answered Vera, patting her shoulder, "don't cry!"

They sat down together on a bench standing in the path close to the river, Vera listening to the manifestations of Millicent's troubled soul. How tiny her grief seemed, under the spaces of the night. How insignificant all their hopes, loves, ambitions, beside the forces of nature, the sweep of the river, the stars, the sombre cliffs opposite, and the breath of the night wind which once again blew, in colder gusts, out of the north.

Dora came presently and joined them.

"Summer is gone!" she said as Vera had.

"And what will winter bring us, I wonder?" Vera answered. "It seems, when the first cool days appear, as if we got up, put aside the laziness summer has bred in us, and braced ourselves for more strenuous purposes — harder problems —"

"And more happiness, perhaps —" said Dora.

"Yes! Perhaps more happiness. And if it does n't come to us we must make it our business to go and find it."

At Dora's approach, Millicent had lifted her head from Vera's shoulder and wiped her eyes.

"That's the devil of being a woman!" she said; "she can't go in search of it. She can only wait for it to come and find her!"

Vera slipped an arm around her waist.

"That's an old-fashioned idea, Millicent!"

"Is it? Well, just you try anything else!" answered Millicent.

"What do you think, Dora?" asked Vera.

"We're pretty helpless!" answered Dora. "We can't search for it as men can, but I am not sure that they have any better chance of finding it."

"The trouble with all of us, of course," answered Vera, "as the moralists have been telling us for ages, only we don't pay any attention to them, is that we don't make the most of what we have."

"We may have a great deal and need one little thing to make what we've got already worth while!" said Dora.

"Exactly," said Millicent. "Like a welsh rabbit without paprika, like a supper at the Alcazar without champagne, like wearing a Paris gown without having your hair properly done! The trouble with all those high-brows that have been telling people how to behave, from Moses down, is, that they try to lay down general rules based on their own little experiences. Do you know what your father told me to do the other day, Vera? He said, 'If you want a real guide, comforter, and

friend read Marcus O'Somebody.' I did n't catch the name, so I said, 'Marcus O' — who?' 'Marcus O'Relius,' he said, 'the great Roman Emperor'! I said 'Rats!' As if a Roman Emperor, dead no one knows how many centuries, could give any advice worth having to a Broadway show-girl!"

Vera laughed. "That sounds like the Millicent Blomfield of old times. You're feeling better!"

"I am!" answered Millicent.

"Have n't you been feeling well, Millicent?" asked Dora.

"She's been having a little attack of the blues," said Vera.

"Do you know why I feel better?" said Millicent. She was sitting very erect with a sudden return of her dashing air. "Because I've just made a discovery and I'll bet it's worth as much as any of old Marcus O'Relius's mottoes. It's this — don't be undecided about anything; nobody can be happy if they don't know what they want. Well, I've come to a decision. I'm going to marry Max Bebel!"

At this moment Max Bebel himself was seen approaching. "S-s-s-h! don't tell any one," continued Millicent. "He has n't asked me yet, but I'm sure he's going to as soon as he can muster up the courage!"

Max, who had been lingering in the neighborhood, seemed to have formed a sudden resolution, and, drawing near, he asked Millicent in a trembling voice if she would not like to walk out on to the little dock and see

the lights of the city which were visible from it. Milliecent got up and left Vera and Dora to themselves.

Vera put a hand on one of Dora's.

"Will the winter bring *you* more happiness, Dora?"

A sigh trembled on Dora's lips.

"I am happy in a way —" She stopped, and then, as if in spite of herself, she cried, "But, oh, if I could see my babies, Vera!"

"Your babies?" answered Vera in astonishment.

"My two babies. One is five and one is six now, and they were taken away from me four years ago." And Dora at last told her story.

"I was to blame," she said. "I was pleasure-loving, just as I am now, and I was reckless then, besides. I had n't really done anything wicked, but I might have, and all the circumstances were against me. I don't blame my husband except for his vindictiveness and because he made up his mind to punish me just as cruelly as it was possible to, and to make me suffer for my whole life for something for which he was partly to blame!"

"He was a brute!" exclaimed Vera.

"No, he was n't a brute, but he was self-willed and obstinate. When he had made up his mind to a thing he was immovable."

"But, Dora, how could he take your children away — babies like that!"

"The judge ordered it. He was a friend of my husband's."

"How awful! But your husband will surely change.

People can't keep up those feelings of hatred and revenge forever! It would require too much of an effort! Surely sometime he will let you see them again!"

"You don't know him."

"If you could marry again, Dora!"

"Yes, I have thought of that! But I would live as I am for the rest of my life if I could see my babies once in a while!"

"But, Dora, have you never tried?"

"Oh, Vera, what have n't I tried! Everything! I fought the judge's decision and was beaten! I begged and begged! He was like granite! When I came here I wrote letter after letter!"

"How long ago was that, Dora?"

"I stopped writing long ago because my letters one after another were sent back unopened."

"Poor Dora! But now that you have told me I am going to do something about it. I am going to see that man! I don't believe that any one can keep such anger alive forever. Where is he?"

"I don't know! At home, I suppose."

"I shall find out! Things can't and shan't go on like this. Millicent's happiness is coming and so is yours. You'll see!"

"That's very sweet of you, Vera," answered Dora, but her words had a not too hopeful sound, and, clasping hands, they sat in silence until Peter appeared from the darkness and joined them, whereupon Dora, presently seeing Ted smoking by himself, remembered some-

thing she had to say to him and, getting up, left them together.

At the other end of the lawn at a table screened by a shrub or two, who should be seated but Edith and Fred. This was Fred's other engagement.

The Richmonds had just returned to town, and Fred, who through membership in his other club was allowed the privileges of this, had, thinking it an excellent secluded place, prevailed on Edith to meet him there. They had just finished their cocktails and soup when Fred, noticing that Edith was staring at something as if transfixed, turned his head. Out of the clubhouse one after another appeared Uncle John, Vera, Dora, Muriel, Millicent, Max, Peter, Tim, and Ted! "Damn!" exclaimed Fred under his breath, and reaching up hastily he turned out the electric light which was shining on them from close at hand. The waiter appearing with their next course, noticing that it was out, started to turn it on again.

"Don't do that!" ordered Fred quickly. "It makes too much of a glare!"

"Well, I must say," remarked Edith after the waiter had disappeared, "that bringing me here was n't the cleverest thing you've ever done exactly!"

"I've been coming up here all summer, and it's the first time I've ever run across any one I've known!"

"Who have you been coming with?"

"Fellows from the club."

"Well, we'd better go," said Edith crossly.

"We can't! They'd be sure to see us. We've got to wait until after *they've* gone. There is n't light enough now for them to recognize us!"

"Sure you have n't been here with your handsome friend," asked Edith, "and some of the others? They seem to be at home here!"

"I've never seen 'em here before," answered Fred stoutly, which was n't true because he'd been there with them more than once.

Edith and Fred did n't enjoy their dinner at first, but as it became apparent that their discovery was not likely, they derived some pleasure from watching the others, and presently, while they were waiting for them to take their departure, something happened which made them forget their apprehensions entirely. The larger party having finished their dinner broke up into various groups. They saw Vera and Millicent Blomfield seat themselves together on a bench at the other end of the lawn where presently they were joined by Dora. They also noticed that Max Bebel was lingering irresolutely in the neighborhood. The silhouette of Max's figure showed distinctly moving restlessly about, looking repeatedly toward the bench on which Millicent sat, until they saw him with a reckless gesture dash up and speak to her. Whereupon Millicent joining him they walked together out on the pier, disappearing into the darkness. Presently Peter was seen to seat himself with Vera and Dora. After a time Dora crossed the lawn and joined Ted, while at the same moment Max and Millicent

appeared out of the darkness which obscured the end of the pier and turned in the direction of the table at which Edith and Fred were sitting. Max's irresolution seemed to have given place to a proud air of proprietorship. He walked firmly with his head thrown back — as if he were just about to bellow out the Meistersinger prize song — until, coming close to Fred's table, he stopped, threw his arms around Millicent, and with incredible courage gave her a loud smack.

"Well, really!" exclaimed Edith, half-laughing and half-annoyed when a turn in the path had taken them out of earshot. "Why will such people insist on making love in public!"

"Sh-h-h!" answered Fred; "some one else is coming!" And they saw that Vera and Peter were pacing the path Millicent and Max had just left, approaching at each turn closer to Fred's and Edith's table, until presently they came to a stop just on the other side of one of the shrubs which screened it. At this point, not three feet from Fred and Edith, they were shielded, too, from their own party, and all at once, plainly quite ignorant that a table at which two people were sitting was close to them, they exchanged in audible whispers a number of endearing phrases, after which followed distinctly the sound of two kisses, then turned back and joined the others who were getting ready to go.

"Well, really!" exclaimed Edith again, this time icily; "this is too disgusting! None of these people have any sense of decency apparently!"

"They're making love!" answered Fred. "What's the harm in that?"

"Before I come here again," answered Edith angrily, "I intend to find out what kind of a place this is. I should call it hardly respectable." And getting up impetuously she hurried down a side path which gave access to the motors, followed by the astonished Fred. Luckily at this time Tim's party had vanished inside the clubhouse. Edith would hardly speak to Fred during their ride back to town and bade him a frosty good-night, leaving him unexpectedly with the rest of the evening on his hands with nothing to do but to speculate on the inexplicable capriciousness of the feminine character. If he had known, the next morning, that Peter received from Edith by the first mail the sweetest kind of a note telling him that she was back in town again for the winter and asking him to drop in for a cup of tea the following Tuesday, he might have understood her behavior of the night before. And then again he might n't.

About the time Peter was reading Edith's note the next morning, old Mr. Penfield appeared at Vera's. Vera and her father were at breakfast.

"Well, Phil's dead again!" he announced, sitting down by the table with his hat in his hand and refusing Vera's offer of a cup of coffee. "That's the third one to go this summer."

"How did Auntie take it, grandfather?"

"The doctor says she can't stand many more such shocks and advised us not to let her have another,

but this morning, when she found the cage empty, she raised such a row we had to get one. The doctor wants us to take her to the country somewhere. The change might do her good!"

"But who could take her? You can't just send her off with nobody but a nurse!"

"I know it!" Mr. Penfield answered, and he looked fixedly at Vera.

Vera rose to the occasion.

"Let me go with her, grandfather!"

"But you work or something, don't you?"

"There's hardly anything doing now, grandfather."

"I'd like it if you could."

"Of course I can, grandfather. When shall we start?"

"The doctor says the sooner the better. If you could be ready by to-morrow morning I'll make all the arrangements to-day."

"All right. Where shall we go?"

"Not far," Mr. Penfield answered, mentioning a country hotel within fifty miles of town. "And I hope not for long."

"All right, then. I'll get ready to-day and you can telephone me the trains later."

This was a sore disappointment for Peter and for Vera, too, but there was nothing to do except to make the best of it. Peter proposed spending his week-ends at the hotel Vera was going to, but as she was determined that they should keep their engagement to themselves she would not consent to it. However, they spent their

last evening together, and Vera, to mitigate Peter's disappointment over her refusal to allow him to visit her and the prospect of a month's separation — perhaps a longer one — was as gracious as her father's presence permitted. Conversations on the telephone were to be indulged in occasionally and numerous letters were to be written.

That cold north wind, whose first breath had passed over them at the yacht club, had kept blowing steadily, and under its vigorous assault all the mists, the vapors, the dust, the languors of summer had been swept from the city. The whole town shone distinct, vivid, glittering, under the rays of the sun in this crystal air. Windows, open no longer, shot back blinding reflections, brasses and other metals gleamed, even the bricks and stones of buildings sparkled brightly, and hats, faces, and shoes, men, animals, and all inanimate objects glowed richly, rubbed into brightness by the sweep of the north wind blowing through the canyons of the streets.

It was into this garnished world that Vera stepped next morning. A taxi waited at the door and Peter waited at the taxi. The Kilkenny had promised to look after Uncle John, to see that he did n't smoke too much, ate the proper food, and went to bed early, and Vera's maid-of-all-work had been given final instructions. A small trunk had just been fastened to the taxi, and Peter held a travelling-bag in one hand and an umbrella in the other. Vera was making her way slowly

downstairs, stopping to say good-bye to various tenants who were all expecting it. One might have thought that she was starting on a voyage around the world. First there was Ted, then the young men, then Max Bebel, then the young ladies, then the Blomfields, then Dora, then Rose, and last of all Sid Smallshaw showing two rows of ivory teeth down in the area — then, of course, Peter. She shook hands with him quite impersonally, got in, and Peter shut the door. They had already said good-bye upstairs. Everybody who had front windows was looking out of them.

Suddenly the entrance door burst open, and Millicent, dashing down the steps, put her head in at the window of the taxicab.

"But I'll be back long before *that*!" Peter heard Vera say in answer to some communication of Millicent's.

"If you are n't I'll call it off," answered Millicent.

Vera laughed skeptically. "Indeed, you won't! But I'll be here, never fear." And the taxi sliding rapidly away disappeared around the corner.

CHAPTER XXIII

VERA's departure left a tremendous void in the fabric of Peter's existence and to try to fill it he called on Edith the Tuesday afternoon she had fixed. He mentioned it to Vera on the telephone afterwards and as she received the news — or so Peter thought — with cheerful acquiescence, he went again, finally dropping in as often as Edith intended that he should. The first time there were no interruptions, but the second Fred was announced. Fred's expression on seeing Peter there was a study. He had assumed, since the scene they had witnessed at the yacht club in which Vera and Peter took part, that Peter was definitely out of the way, therefore his chagrin was so apparent that Edith could n't help laughing, which only increased it.

Edith was growing a little tired of Fred and thought sometimes of getting rid of him, but she knew that he could be stubborn, unreasonable, and even violent, and she was therefore a little afraid of him. At the same time these dangerous qualities of his attracted her and made her loath to abandon the pleasure she derived from playing with them, and while she resented Fred's tyrannical methods, she loved to thwart them, and had determined to use Peter as an implement for that purpose. She did this partly because of resentment against Fred, partly because of resentment against Peter for having

dared to fall in love with Vera, and partly because of resentment against Vera for daring to take liberties with a young man whom she had provisionally marked as her own.

Vera's sojourn in the country lengthened from weeks to months and Peter went to Edith's oftener and oftener. He frequently met Fred there, and noticed increasing signs of hostility and sulkiness in his manner, but he never for a moment imagined that Edith was deliberately using him because of an unholy delight she experienced in making Fred jealous. He was pretty sure at times that Fred's behavior *was* due to jealousy, but attributed it with modest pride to the fact that Mrs. Richmond, of course, must like him — Peter — the best.

In the meantime, in the list of autumn publications announced by Richmond Sons & Richmond appeared "Pansy, a Novel by an Anonymous Author," and a new work of fiction by Mr. Peter Watergate, author of "The Prisoner."

The success of "Pansy," whether due to its inherent merits or to the fact that it was printed in white letters on a black ground, was immediate and stupendous. Richmond Sons & Richmond had stumbled on a winner and the anonymous author's fortune was assured. Charles was immensely elated because he had finally decided to accept it, and Tim's startling idea of reversing the usual combination of type and paper had planted him solidly in a position of authority second only to Uncle George himself.

Peter's book did n't do so well. While a hundred thousand copies of "Pansy" had been sold, Peter's book had only sold ten thousand — one tenth — but Peter knew that his was a ten times better book. Besides, Vera's contention had been verified, and as it had done well enough to make Richmond Sons & Richmond's publication of his next a certainty, Peter was content.

But Fred was n't. Fred witnessed the astounding success of "Pansy" with astonishment and something like envy. His own book was almost finished, having taken an inexplicably long time, but Fred was n't satisfied with it. He had worked over it until he had gone stale, and as he realized how little he had done to really improve it, he had begun to wonder in how much he had been indebted to Dora for the success of his previous efforts. Probably more than he had ever imagined.

He had intended to continue the intimacy with her which he had taken the trouble to nourish during the summer, but Edith's return had made him forget these intentions and he had stopped going there once more. His efforts to monopolize Edith monopolized his own time and he saw no more of his companions of the summer. Even the Napoleonic doctor had disappeared, except that on one occasion, while going up Sixth Avenue in a taxicab, Fred thought that he had seen him talking with Sid Smallshaw on a corner.

Fred was n't happy. Everything seemed to be going against him. Not only had the lightly considered Dora

blossomed into an author with a national reputation, but even Peter had had a book accepted by Richmond Sons & Richmond, and published with fair success, while he was still laboring on one which they had rejected. He resented Peter's good fortune much more than Dora's, and this, coupled with the fact that he saw in him a rival for Edith's favors, roused a bitter feeling of rancor against him which Edith's manoeuvres kept increasing.

One day Fred, chancing to meet Peter on the street, warned him off the premises, so to speak, as he had done once before. Peter, refusing to be intimidated, continued to call on Edith as usual. After encountering Fred there two or three more times, Fred waylaid him and threatened him again, this time so violently and with such complete loss of temper that Peter lost his. This scene took place not far from the Kilkenny while Peter was on his way home. He reached there angry, humiliated, and unhappy, but more determined than ever to see Edith as often as he pleased.

Ted had taken a sheet of paper out of an envelope which had just been handed in and was reading it as Peter opened the door.

"Here's news!" Ted exclaimed. "An invitation to the wedding of Max and Millicent at St. Bridget's Chapel, and to a reception later at Dora St. David's. By Jove, who'd have thought it! Did you suspect anything?"

"Of course I did! So did everybody else, you lunk-head!"

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Ted.

"The matter is that if Fred Filbert does n't keep a civil tongue in his head I'm going to punch it. His head I mean!"

"Better let him alone. What's he been doing?" And Peter told Ted the whole story from the beginning.

"I can't see anything in it worth fighting about!" remarked Ted when Peter had finished.

"I don't intend to fight if I can help it, but I don't intend to let Fred Filbert dictate to me!"

"What on earth does Mrs. Richmond let him go there so often for?"

"How do I know?" answered Peter.

"Well, it's evident that she wants him to. She does n't have to see him if she does n't feel like it. Look here, what are *you* doing there? Trying to cut Filbert out?"

Peter glared at Ted angrily.

"Of course I'm not!"

"Then take my advice and keep away!"

"And let Filbert think that I don't go there any more because I'm afraid of him? Not much!"

"What do you care what he thinks? Besides, if you don't look out you'll be getting Mrs. Richmond into trouble. Not that that would matter much, because I should say that it's mostly her fault. Look out for the married women, my boy!" continued Ted, shaking his head wisely; "they say they're twice as dangerous as any other kind!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" retorted Peter irritably.

"By the way!" remarked Ted with an offended note, "here's a letter for you." And he tossed it over.

It was from Vera saying that in two days she would be back in town with Auntie, who was much better. Peter read this with a sigh of relief. He really regretted that he had ever made the first call on Edith after he and Vera had arrived at their understanding. At the time he had been conscious of a slight feeling of disloyalty, which he had excused on the grounds of his loneliness and for the sophistical reason that it would have been rude not to. He had an engagement to take tea with Mrs. Richmond on the following afternoon, and that would be the end. The day after Vera would be home, and whether it was rude or not he would stop going there. Besides, it would have been a little more considerate on Mrs. Richmond's part, he thought, if she had managed it so that he would n't have had to meet Fred there quite so often. Almost every time he called he found Fred sitting there or else Fred found him. Well, he would call on Mrs. Richmond on the following day as he had promised, and the day after that Vera would be back and then everything would be lovely.

"This invitation is addressed to both of us. Shall I accept for you?" Ted broke in. He spoke solemnly, wearing an expression which told Peter that he had hurt his feelings.

"What invitation?"

"Max and Millicent's, of course!"

"Well, what do *you* think!" And Peter rising, grasped

Ted playfully by the scruff of the neck. Ted rose, too, and a scuffle ensued which ended in both falling on the sofa. This was understood by each to mean that the past was to be forgotten, and presently Peter's mellifluous whistle sounded through the flat.

The following afternoon at four-thirty Peter issued from the Kilkenny to pay his last call on Edith Richmond. It was a glorious day in early January, very much like the one on which Vera had taken her departure, but it was a little colder, and the wind was west now blowing straight through the cross-streets toward the East River. The bright wind clutched at Peter's coat as he stepped out and Peter buttoned it quickly, seizing his hat, too, just in time and pressing it more firmly on his head. A sky of intense blue spread above, darkening now as the sun neared the horizon, and large clouds, fleecy white and pink, floated indifferent to the vigor of the air currents below them. Peter, glad that Vera would be home on the morrow, glad that he was n't going to Mrs. Richmond's any more, and glad that he was to be rid of the annoyance of Fred's hostility, stepped out briskly in the direction of Mr. Penfield's house.

Peter sped energetically to his destination and rang the bell. William, the Swedish butler, announced that Mrs. Richmond had had to go out, but was expected back momentarily, and had left word that Mr. Watergate was to wait. William showed Peter into Edith's little parlor and Peter sat down.

At about the same moment Fred Filbert, carrying a flat parcel, wrapped in pale, buff-colored paper, descended the steps of his bachelor apartment house and stepped out briskly too, also in the direction of Mr. Penfield's.

Fred, too, was in better spirits than usual.

In the first place, he felt pretty certain that the vigor and brutality of his warning to Peter the afternoon before would prove efficacious, and, in the second, he had just finished the reconstruction of his novel.

The end of his labors being plainly in view, he had been working over it industriously all day, intending to take it around to Charles as soon as he had finished it, but on looking at his watch after writing the last word he saw that it was rather too late, almost five, and he determined instead to call on Edith and leave it for Charles there. This was the flat parcel which Fred was carrying. He had done it up carefully, and on its wrapping of pale, buff-colored paper he had written the title with his own name and address below.

Fred, therefore, better pleased with life than for some time past, turned into the street in which Mr. Penfield's house stood and, ascending to the front door, rang the bell. At the same time the steps of two other persons, approaching from different directions through the maze of streets, were drawing near to take part in the fateful drama about to be enacted within the four walls of Edith's little parlor.

William, the Swedish butler, answered Fred's sum-

mons as he had answered Peter's, but while Edith had told him what to say if Peter called she had said nothing about Fred. William hesitated a moment. It struck him that, while he had often told people that Edith was out when she was really in, he could hardly say that she was in when she was really out. He therefore told the truth.

"When will she be back?" Fred demanded.

William, having no information as to the precise moment of Edith's return, replied that he did n't know.

"All right, I'll wait awhile!" And depositing his parcel on the hall table he divested himself of his coat and hat, and with a certain air of confident proprietorship parted the curtains of Edith's little parlor and walked in only to observe, to his unbounded indignation, Peter seated in an easy-chair before the fire with his feet on the fender.

At this final evidence of Peter's total indifference to his warnings, all semblance of self-control on Fred's part vanished utterly, and, pounding a convenient table with his fist, he shouted with blazing eyes:

"You get out of here!"

Peter had heard Fred's voice in the hall, knew he was in for it, and had determined to keep his temper if possible.

"What's that?" he answered.

"I say you get out of here!" Fred repeated, advancing a step nearer.

"Why?"

"Never mind why! I say you get out!"

"I'd like to oblige you, but Mrs. Richmond left word that I was to wait for her," answered Peter.

"I don't care what Mrs. Richmond said!" shouted Fred. "Will you get out or won't you!"

"Hang it all!" cried Peter, beginning to lose control of himself, "you can't order me about like that!"

By way of reply Fred suddenly lunged forward and gave the chair in which Peter sat a push causing it to capsize with its occupant. Peter described a curve, and in an instant found himself lying on his back on the floor with the chair resting on his middle. He extricated himself and got up quickly, dignity and temper badly ruffled.

"What the devil is the matter with you, Filbert?" he exclaimed; "have you gone crazy? Do you think you've the right to treat any one like this who calls on Mrs. Richmond?"

"Never mind about anybody else!" answered Fred, more threateningly than ever. "I'm talking to *you*! I know *you*! I saw you hugging Vera Wildwood the other night up by the river! I know what you think *you* are! You think you're a lady-killer! Well, you can hug Vera Wildwood all you want to, but you keep away from here! Do you understand?"

"Lord, what a low-down brute you are, Filbert!"

"Do you understand? Are you going to get out?"

"No!" shouted Peter. "I'm not, until I get good and ready!"

"You're not?"

"No!"

Peter managed to land one blow somewhere in the region of one of Fred's ears before he found himself on the floor again with Fred on top.

A moment later, Edith, the third participant, mounted the steps and let herself in with a latch-key. The hat she was wearing was a becoming one, and she had decided while approaching the house to keep it on during Peter's call. She had decided that the effect produced by hurrying into her parlor — where Peter would be waiting — with the announcement that she was so sorry to be late and that she simply *would* not stop to take off her hat, would be rather worth while. Edith paused, therefore, for a moment to look in the mirror which hung near the door. While making a few hasty adjustments, she heard, issuing from her parlor, certain curious sounds, a kind of knocking, scraping, and as of some one taking difficult and labored breaths. What could Peter be doing? And, with one last touch to the brim of her hat, she made her entrance. This entrance was almost immediately followed by a scream or rather a whoop of consternation and alarm.

Beyond the table in a corner of the room, already dusky in the waning winter's day, she discerned a dark mass writhing on the floor. Her first thought was that Peter was having some kind of a fit, and, reaching for the electric switch, she flooded the room with light only to perceive, writhing and twisting on the floor, instead of two arms, four; instead of one pair of legs, two; in-

stead of one face pale with suffering, two; the faces of Fred and Peter, one bloody, both crimson with rage. Edith's first impulse being to conceal this disgraceful scene from the rest of the household, she sprang to the door, closed it, and then stamping a foot furiously she cried repeatedly:

"How dare you! What do you mean? Get up at once! How dare you?"

Gradually these significant sentences seemed to penetrate through senses absorbed by the madness of battle, and presently Edith, watching for an opportunity, seized Fred's coat-collar, and, putting all her strength in the effort, managed to drag him away from Peter, who was lying underneath. Fred, beyond a certain puffiness which was already beginning to show on one ear, revealed no scars; but Peter was a sad sight. A large yellow lump decorated his forehead, one eye was partly closed, and his nose was bleeding freely. At sight of him Edith screamed again, and turning to Fred she cried furiously:

"You miserable, detestable brute!"

Peter was slowly getting up. Under Fred's onslaught, which had borne him heavily to the floor, he had had no chance, and while he had struggled fiercely to reverse their positions, Fred's superior weight had made it impossible. Peter was getting up with murder in his heart. He was n't as badly hurt as his appearance might lead one to believe, and he was temporarily blind to every idea except one, to do Fred serious physical injury. His rage and indignation against Fred was so over-

whelming for the moment that Edith's presence acted as a deterrent less on him than on the latter, whose appetite for combat was partly sated through having got the best of it.

Peter stood for a moment as if dazed, facing the others, who were also standing, and then, moving gradually toward Fred, suddenly launched a series of terrific blows at Fred's head, which caused him to reel. Fred, recovering himself, immediately sprang at Peter, and the encounter began again, only this time the combatants remained standing — Peter did not intend to act the underdog again — rushing round and round the room, staggering under each other's blows, overturning tables, chairs, and lamps, and knocking against Edith, who was screaming now in real terror, until suddenly there rushed into the room the fourth actor, in the person of the immaculate Charles.

Charles's ears had been assaulted, immediately on opening the front door, by Edith's screams and the sounds of crashing furniture and breaking glass, indicating that some scene of extreme violence was taking place in her parlor. Charles, who made it his business to keep himself informed to an extent of Edith's activities, half-suspected what the trouble was, and, furious at this uproar in his own house, opened the door on a scene of desolation. Edith was standing against the wall screaming, her arms hanging helplessly by her sides, while Peter and Fred, blind with fury, were staggering about the room raining blows on one another while they stum-

bled heedlessly over the wreckage they had wrought, books tumbled to the floor, furniture, broken vases, and the smashed débris of Edith's bric-à-brac.

At the sight of this ruin in his own house, at this destruction of his property, at this utter disregard of the proprieties in his personal precincts, a fearful surge of rebellion long seething in Charles's breast boiled up. He seized Fred around the body, pinning his arms, and shouted to Edith to do the same to Peter, but this was unnecessary. Peter, the moment Charles had rendered Fred helpless, fell to the floor in a condition of collapse.

Charles, on perceiving this, pushed Fred into a chair, and, rushing out of the house, hailed a taxicab which he had seen through the window discharging a fare on the other side of the street. Immediately rushing back again, he rang loudly and repeatedly for William, and, on the latter's appearing, cried:

"Here, take hold of him! I'm sending him home and I want you to go with him and see that he gets there!"

"But, Charles!" cried Edith. "He may be dying!"

"I don't care whether he is or not, but he's not going to die in *this* house! Here, take hold!"

"I will get my hat," William announced.

"Never mind your hat! *Take hold!*"

An extraordinary decision and energy seemed suddenly to have seized upon Charles. Edith had already flown to the dining-room, and, returning with a glass of brandy-and-water, had induced Peter to drink it.

"Take hold!" ordered Charles again, and between

himself and William they got Peter into the taxi and it started off, William going with him. Charles slammed the taxi door on Peter and William, and, grimly ascending the steps, appeared again in Edith's parlor and faced Fred. "Now," he ordered, "you get out!"

"All right," answered Fred. "I'll go, but I just want to ex—"

"Get out, do you hear?"

Fred, quite cowed by a dawning realization of what he had been guilty of, rose without another word and, followed by Charles, stepped into the hall, put on his hat, seized his overcoat, and left the house, Charles closing the door viciously after him. On turning away from the door Charles noticed a flat parcel wrapped in pale, buff paper lying on the table, and, glancing at it, suddenly seized it and opening the door stepped out. Fred had reached the bottom of the steps. "Is this yours?" Charles cried, and raising the package he launched it with all his force at Fred's head. The latter dodged instinctively, the package flew past him, struck a tree, burst, and in a moment the whole expanse of the street was white with a multitude of sheets of square white paper flying, whirling, turning, and scampering like so many liberated sprites before the boisterous gusts of the west wind which still blew strongly.

Fred, with an involuntary movement, dashed to pick them up, but stopped at once, for already companies and regiments of them were far down the street rushing, sliding, fluttering, and dancing joyously toward

the river. Fred watched them, horrified and yet fascinated.

If Fred at any period of his career deserved sympathy more than at another, it was at that moment when — dimly conscious of his own ineradicable ignorance, drooping under the reaction from his own violence — he stood watching wretchedly the fruits of his most laborious efforts flying away from him lightly, heedlessly, to be lost forever.

Charles waited for a moment, saw the bursting package, the joyous flight of Fred's pages, and Fred's own attitude of despair, and with a gleam of bitter triumph slammed the door, stepped quickly across the hall, entered Edith's parlor, slammed that door, locked it, and, seizing Edith by an arm, began beating her between the shoulder blades, dragging her this way and that about the room, thumping her thin back with his clenched fist until the blows resounded hollowly.

"Damn you!" hissed Charles, grinding his teeth. "Take that! And that! And that!" All the suppressed resentment of years was finding an outlet at last. "Take that! And that! And that!" And Edith was taking it in a curiously passive way. When Charles dragged her one way, she followed, when he dragged her another, she followed still. She said not one word, made not one sound as Charles still thumped and thumped. "Damn you!" repeated Charles. "Take that! This is the last time you are to have a man in this parlor without my permission! This is the last time you buy anything on

credit without letting me know! This is the last time you invite people to dinner without consulting me! Do you understand?"

And to Charles's astonishment she answered humbly, "Yes, Charles."

"Are you going to do what I tell you after this?"

"Yes, Charles!"

"Are you going to drop all these damned silly flirtations and try to behave yourself?"

"Yes, Charles."

"Do you admit that ever since we were married you've been nothing but a deceitful, lying parasite?"

"Yes, Charles."

Charles listened to these replies in almost open stupefaction. The complete transformation wrought in Edith, and indicated by the humility of her tone and the complete submission of her attitude, by her shrinking manner, and her glance, which seemed a combination of futile apprehension, of wonder, and almost of admiration, so astonished him that for a moment he forgot to be violent.

"Well, go upstairs; you look like the devil!" he mumbled.

And Edith, rising, went as she was, dishevelled, her hair disarranged, submissively out of the room, and as she closed the door she looked at him timidly, almost entreatingly. A disguise seemed to have slipped from her, a disguise of pretence and bluff, leaving only a frightened and cowardly woman, an out-bullied bully.

Charles began pacing up and down, still seething with an unwonted vigor; he had not, it seemed to him, done enough, had not expressed himself sufficiently, the affair had ended too soon and had given him too little opportunity to work off the resentment of years. He put on his coat and overcoat without knowing why, and then seeing the taxicab with William inside drawing up to the door he started to let him in. In going out of the room he stumbled over the legs of a broken table.

"Here!" he said as he opened the door, "clean that mess up!" And removing his hat and coat he mounted the stairs and turned the knob of Edith's door. The door was locked. "Let me in!" he called. The key was turned and going in, he seized her as he had done before and began thumping her back again, dragging her this way and that as he had done downstairs. The extraordinary effect this treatment had had on her prompted him to repeat the experiment, and once more his blows resounded and once more he hissed through his teeth, which he ground more horribly than ever. "There, damn you, take that — and another thing, that car you call yours is half mine, and I'll be damned if I'll ever sit in it squeezed in between you and anybody else again! Do you understand?" And once more Edith, yielding, submissive, allowed herself to be dragged about, and once more her thin back resounded like a drum to the impact of Charles's fist.

"By Heavens!" muttered Charles to himself. "I believe she likes it!" And with a parting thump he raised

his finger menacingly. "Now!" — and he spoke with an intentionally dangerous restraint — "*I am master here! I intend to run this house, and I intend that you take your place in this establishment as my submissive wife and stay there! And — every — time — you — forget!*" — and Charles, raising his clenched fist aloft, surveyed it as if it were a battle-axe — "*every — time — you — forget!* this will remind you!"

Charles turned, left the room, and going downstairs got once more into his coat and hat. There was no special reason for his going out. He had come home intending to stay there, but the fund of energy released by the violent occurrences of the afternoon still seethed within him, and with it a sense of extraordinary elation, of victory, of power!

He opened the door and began pacing the streets with steps supernaturally light. Never before had Charles's eye shone with such a glance of sure command, never before had his shoulders been carried so squarely, so confidently. He strode on like a conqueror.

This was Charles's day.

CHAPTER XXIV

PETER's condition for a time after he had been escorted home by William seemed really quite serious, a condition bordering on hysteria caused by his physical and nervous exhaustion — wild resentment at Fred's outrageous behavior and compunction over the state Vera would find him in, but after Ted had bathed his contusions, undressed him, and made him go to bed, he began to quiet down. Ted made some coffee, cooked some bacon and eggs — a universal panacea in Ted's opinion — and induced Peter to eat them. During this time he told Ted the whole story. Ted, who usually took things calmly, announced when Peter had finished that he intended to go around to Fred's flat the next morning and thrash him soundly. Ted had been a football hero at Harvard in his time and was a really formidable little athlete, but Peter would n't hear of it. There had been violence enough, and more of it would n't help matters, but Ted's indignation seemed to exercise a calming influence on him and presently he went to sleep. This was about eight o'clock. He slept straight through until ten the next morning, and when he woke seemed himself again except for the discolorations around his eye and on his forehead. Ted got his breakfast, and having an engagement with a magazine publisher, hurried off. When he got back at noon Peter was not there, but he

had left a note. The note said that he was going away, he did n't know for how long. He was taking his bag and later might instruct Ted where to send his trunk. That was all. Ted was very much worried fearing that Peter might be suffering from some kind of aberration, but he was helpless. He rushed off to the Grand Central Station thinking it probable that Peter might be bound for some point in New England, but did n't find him, in fact did n't expect to. He got his luncheon near the station, after standing about for more than an hour, and on returning to the Kilkenny met Sid, who informed him that Mis' Vera was back and had been asking for both him and Peter.

Ted went up to the Wildwoods' flat, and Vera, answering the bell, took him into the sitting-room and closed the door.

"What has Peter gone away for?" she asked immediately.

Ted, without guessing the reason, thought she looked preoccupied and worried.

"I don't know," he answered; "did you know he had gone?"

"I saw him. Just as our train was coming into the station, he jumped on one which was starting out. He carried a bag and I thought he looked quite ill."

"Then I just missed him!" exclaimed Ted. "I thought he might have gone there!" And he told Vera the whole story.

"There's one good thing," remarked Ted at last.

"Nobody knows about it. Peter says no one saw him come in, and the Richmonds will naturally want to keep it quiet!"

"Why, Ted, everybody in the Kilkenny is talking about it!" answered Vera.

Peter had thought that his arrival at the Kilkenny had n't been noticed by anybody, but he was mistaken. Tim Richmond and Muriel, lunching at Claremont that afternoon, got back late. As their taxi drew up at the curb, another stopped just in front and, to their intense surprise and horror, Peter, with a yellow lump on his forehead, a black eye, and a bloody nose, got painfully out, leaning on the arm of a bareheaded manservant, and limped into the Kilkenny.

"My God!" exclaimed Tim, "that's our butler!" And by bedtime that night, Muriel and everybody else in the Kilkenny except Dora — they did n't like to tell her on account of Fred — knew down to the minutest detail a story of fierce rivalry between Fred and Peter for Mrs. Richmond's favors resulting finally in a sanguinary combat.

"Good Lord!" cried Ted. "Well, anyhow, it was silly for him to run away! I don't know why he should have gone!"

But Vera knew, or thought she did, and the next morning a letter from Peter, posted in Boston, confirmed her suspicions.

He had run away under the spur of bitter humiliation and a growing realization of the fatuity of his conduct

with Edith. The whole affair had become plain to him. He realized at last the sort of game Fred and Edith were engaged in, and perceived with a fearful sense of mortification that, while in fact his own part had been simply that of gooseberry, he had been going there day after day, blandly sure that he was having the best of it. He admitted to himself now that he had, as Ted had suggested, been half-tempted to cut Fred out, perfectly certain that he could do so if he wanted to, while Edith was simply using him, when and where *she* wanted to with perfect ease. And during this time he had sometimes half-forgotten Vera.

Peter wrote all this to Vera, not sparing himself in the least. When he came to the fight in Edith's parlor, he abased himself still more, describing the lump on his forehead, his black eye, his bloody nose, to make plain to her the disgusting spectacle he had finally presented when his perfectly childish conduct had reached its logical culmination.

Vera read all this with blazing eyes and flushed cheeks. It made her furiously angry. Something in Peter's letter, in spite of the note of self-condemnation which filled it, seemed to ask for pity, and Vera would n't give it. At that moment she considered Peter a cowardly egotist, and if he had given her his address — which he had n't — would not have made use of it.

Vera put Peter's letter away expecting to take up once more the routine of her life, but the following morning her grandfather telephoned that Auntie had

had a stroke. Vera hurried there, but even then was too late. What residue of life was left in that ancient body had slipped suddenly away.

The news of Auntie's death caused real consternation at the Kilkenny. Millicent's and Max's wedding was only a week distant, and both felt that it would be almost impossible to get married without Vera's presence. Millicent felt this more strongly than Max, but as soon as he understood how Millicent felt he said that he felt that way himself. Dora, too, was deeply disappointed, as she had counted on Vera's help at the evening reception which was to follow the wedding.

Millicent and Max in this dilemma called on Vera to find out just how long she expected to stay in mourning.

"I'm not going into mourning exactly," answered Vera. "You see, she was such a very old lady."

"But how long before you could come to the wedding, Vera?"

"Andt the reception afterwards. Doand forget that!" added Max.

"If it was just to the wedding ceremony I could go almost any time, but the reception would be a little different!"

Millicent and Max looked at one another in hesitation, but all at once Millicent said with decision:

"No, we're not going to throw Dora down, Max! We'll wait till Vera can go to the reception, too. How long would that be, Vera?"

"Not more than a couple of months, I should think,"

answered Vera. "I'm sure that if Auntie knew about it, she would n't mind at all. Before she got so old and lost her memory she was very jolly and enjoyed having a good time as much as any one. In fact, I've heard her say more than once that she hoped nobody would make a fuss when she went. But, of course, it is n't so much what you know *she* might have felt about it as how you feel yourself."

"Of course," answered Millicent, "and we'll put it off for two months. It would n't seem right somehow unless you were there, Vera."

Auntie's death and the battle at Mr. Penfield's brought about many readjustments. Mr. Penfield, who had heard rumors of the latter, came around one morning and asked Vera about it. Vera could n't get out of telling him. Grandfather Penfield, as his habit was, listened without comment, but about a week later William, the butler, telephoned that Mr. Penfield would like to see Vera and her father at ten the next morning.

Vera was quite certain that this meant a family conference of some kind, and her father's subdued manner indicated that he thought so too. When they reached the house, William, with the air of a sympathetic undertaker, led them up to Grandfather Penfield's room on the top floor in which were Mrs. Richmond, Edith, Charles, Tim, and Grandfather Penfield himself. All were sitting in attitudes of resigned speculation, except Grandfather Penfield, who was circling about as usual, taking an occasional shot at the cuspidor. As soon as

Vera and Uncle John were safely within, Grand Penfield locked the door, scored a bull's-eye, and ang around, delivered himself of a short announc

"This is the first of March," he said. "I months' time, that is, on the first of May, or, to curate, on the thirtieth of April next, I intend to this house. I have already offered it for sale."

"We've been so comfortable, grandfather, tha one almost feel like hoping that you won't find chaser!" answered Edith.

"Whether it is sold or not, I intend to close good on the thirtieth of April," replied Grand Penfield.

"And turn us into the street?" demanded Edit

"Not exactly! I have two small houses in the near Lexington Avenue. I am going to live in them, which I have offered to share with Vera a father —"

"Vera's suggestion, I suppose," interposed Edi

"— and you and Charles, Tim and your mot law," Grandfather Penfield went on, "may occu other rent free if you want to."

"Have you ever seen them, Charles?" asked E

"Know 'em well," answered Charles.

"What are they like?"

"They're all right. Twelve feet wide and abc enough for two!"

"You won't have to give up any room for me Tim. "I've got other plans."

"Going to set up an establishment with your chorus girl?" asked Edith, who was thoroughly angry over Grandfather Penfield's plan.

"Maybe! What do *you* know about it?"

"More than you think," answered Edith.

"That so? Did n't know you were seeing anything more of Filbert these days!"

Edith, ignoring this retort, turned resolutely on Grandfather Penfield, exclaiming: "I think it the most unfair, unjust treatment I ever heard of in my life! You have n't any right to put us in this position! What do you suppose we can say to our friends? The only possible conclusion they will be able to reach will be that we've lost money and have got to economize, and you know what *that* will mean! Nobody will have anything more to do with us! We might as well go into the backwoods and stay there the rest of our lives!"

"If your friends are only your friends because they think you're rich," answered Grandfather Penfield, "it seems to me you're paying a big price for something that is n't worth the money!"

"There's no use moralizing about it," answered Edith. "We live in the world, and we've got to take it as we find it, and I think it most unkind of you to put us in such an awkward position! What do *you* think, mother?" she asked, hoping that Mrs. Richmond might have objections to leaving the big house, too, and so secure in her an ally.

"I think it would do very nicely for you and Charles,"

answered Mrs. Richmond with relish. "I shall hunt up Katie and Mary" — two of the old Irish servants who had had to go under Edith's régime — "and take a little flat somewhere!"

Edith's eyes blazed.

"And Charles and I are to be left in the lurch and told to make the best of it in a two-by-four hovel in a tenement-house district!"

"But we'll be next door, Edith!" remonstrated Vera.

"Yes, you'll be next door, and no doubt you'll be perfectly satisfied, but *I* would n't be! I've never been used to that sort of thing and I'm not going to try now! Charles knows as well as I do what it will mean for us!"

"Of course, I'd rather stay here, too," said Charles, "but if grandfather —"

"Those houses are n't so bad," Tim interposed. "You don't have to live in a big house! Lots of people live in smart little ones!"

"I notice *you're* taking good care not to live in it!" retorted Charles. And Edith added: "Can't you see it's the change? If we'd always lived in a small house, it would be different. *I* know what people will say!"

"Well, you're good at repartee," replied Tim. "Take it out of 'em if they try to get gay! You've got the nastiest tongue I've ever heard, when you want to use it, barring your mother's!"

"And yours!" answered Edith, shooting a shaft of malice at Mrs. Richmond, who, stung by it, shot back:

"If you don't like the house father offers you, why don't you take another?"

"Much obliged for the suggestion," answered Edith; "that's exactly what I *shall* do!"

"I want to say, too," announced Grandfather Penfield, "that on April thirtieth, all existing financial arrangements and the payment of all allowances come to an end!"

"Do you mean to say that you're not going to allow us anything at all?" gasped Edith.

"That's what I mean!" replied Grandfather Penfield.

"But what are we going to do?"

"Charles is in business. He has his salary as secretary of Richmond Sons & Richmond, besides the income he derives from his stock in the company. You can live comfortably on that; very comfortably; but if you *must* be extravagant, get your mother to help you!"

"Mother!" cried Edith, laughing with a kind of hard glee. "She would n't contribute a cent to keep us out of the poor-house! She'll scarify the name of Richmond when she hears what you're doing, but she'll take good care to keep her money to herself!"

"Well, my God!" remarked Tim. "We're not getting anywhere! I guess I'll go!"

"Don't swear, Tim!" said his mother.

"No, don't swear!" repeated Edith acidly. "Break your agreements as much as you please! Go off and live with your chorus girl! Play underhand tricks on us, and

leave Charles and me in the lurch; but as long as you can keep up the game of being pious frauds, and make people believe you're better than they are, everything will be all right!"

"You seem to be very considerate of Charles, all of a sudden," countered Mrs. Richmond. "You've never shown any inclination that way before!"

"Charles and I have had our differences," retorted Edith. "But with all his faults, he's worth more than you and Tim and Vera and her tongue-tied father" — Uncle John had not said one word since he had come into the room — "and the Richmond dog and the Richmond cat and the Richmond servants and Auntie's canary into the bargain!"

"And *I* know why you think so!" cried Mrs. Richmond triumphantly.

Edith turned an infuriated eye on Charles, who conveyed by a convincing shake of the head, which bore every evidence of sincerity, that he had not revealed to his mother or anybody else any information about Edith's castigation; whereupon Edith replied:

"Anything you know about me, you've found out by keeping your ear to the keyhole. I always felt it was a mistake to have my bedroom next to yours!"

"And if he'll take my advice, he'll repeat the dose frequently," Mrs. Richmond went on. "On the whole, it seems to have had a beneficial effect!"

"What *are* they talking about, Tim?" asked Vera.

"I don't know. Let's go!"

During all this time Grandfather Penfield had been circulating nervously about, and as Vera approached him to say good-bye, she thought she detected gleams of indignation and impatience in his small old eyes. She had just put out her hand when Edith arrested her attention by demanding imperiously:

"Are you going?"

Vera answered that she did n't see that there was anything else to stay for.

"I suppose not," replied Edith. "You come together here and deliver an ultimatum — which was probably all settled between you beforehand — putting Charles and myself into the street, and then without another word calmly propose to say good-bye! Very well! But let me tell you something, Vera Wildwood! I believe *you're* at the bottom of the whole thing! Ever since you left here, and went to live in that flat of grandfather's, you've been following out a deep-laid plan! I told you then that you went there so as to get on the right side of him! I suppose you've been making it your business to tell him tales about me!"

"I don't mind telling you what I told him!"

"What was it?"

"She told me," Grandfather Penfield interrupted, "about a fight which took place in your parlor! She told me about that because I asked her to, and she has never told me anything else!"

"And quite enough, too!" interjected Mrs. Richmond.

"And, anyway, Edith, it was n't a secret," said Vera. "Everybody knew! Everybody at the Kilkenny was talking about it!"

"Yes, and *how* did they know?" replied Edith significantly.

"Because," Tim answered, "I saw William helping Watergate into the Kilkenny. I've got a friend who lives there!"

"I know all about your friend," answered Edith darkly. "And I suppose you immediately proceeded to discuss family matters with her!"

"Family matters!" cried Tim. "Oh, Lord!"

Grandfather Penfield was circulating about ever more and more impatiently, and once or twice he had stopped and turned toward Edith as if to deliver himself of some additional announcement. He did so now, in fact, but Edith was off again before he had the opportunity:

"There's no use in carrying this discussion any further," she began. "You've all made up your minds as to what you're going to do, and as far as you are concerned the matter's settled! With you, it may be, but with me it is n't, and before we adjourn I want to say one word! I don't propose to change my mode of living for anybody. I propose to live precisely as I always have, and as my father did before me. I intend to live in this or some other house just as commodious, and if I find that I am not to have your support, I shall see whether Grandfather Penfield has the legal right to withdraw it from

us. Don't think for a moment that I'd hesitate, because I would n't. If it comes to the point, I'll drag the whole matter into the courts to get my rights, and —"

During this tirade Grandfather Penfield was circulating with an even wilder exhibition of feverish disapprobation than ever, and at Edith's mention of legal proceedings, the very name of which was anathema to him, he sprang in front of her, and shaking a finger in her face, cried:

"And do you know what I'll tell the court if you do? I'll tell it that I don't intend to run a bawdy-house for you or anybody else!"

The effect produced by the articulation of this antique word, immeasurably more ancient, even, than the indiscretions of Grandfather Penfield's own youth, and more primitive than he would have used in a calmer moment, was like the explosion of a bombshell. Grandfather Penfield himself, fuming though he was, looked about him quickly with a startled expression; Uncle John sank back as if dazed; Mrs. Richmond threw at her father a glance of shocked reproach; Charles, who certainly could n't stand talk of that kind about his wife, half-advanced as if to take up the cudgels for her; Vera's face wore an expression of puzzled commiseration; and Edith, starting as if she had been struck, burst into an agony of weeping.

"First time I ever saw grandfather lose his temper!" remarked Tim to Vera as they went downstairs together. "But he should n't have said that about Edith! It was a

bit too strong! Well, he's blown the Richmond family to smithereens! We'll never get together again, Vera! That was the last family free-for-all *we'll* ever see! For my part, I don't know whether I'm glad or sorry!"

CHAPTER XXV

VERA and Uncle John accepted Grandfather Penfield's offer regretfully. At the Kilkenny they had been happy and very free, but they could not but put aside their own prepossessions, and when they remembered his queer quiet tolerances, his awkward kindnesses, and his far from congenial surroundings under Edith's régime, inclination as well as duty could not but assist them in their decision. Grandfather Penfield, therefore, got busy with his usual energy and began the renovation of the two small houses.

He began the renovation of both because Edith had capitulated.

She did n't want to! Her assurance had been rapidly returning since her chastisement at the hand of Charles, and feeling that she must take advantage of the first opportunity to regain her prestige, she seized on Grandfather Penfield's ultimatum as a magnificent *casus belli*, and made up her mind to fight it out to a finish, and she would have if it had n't been for Charles.

But Charles had thought the thing over, and perceiving plainly that if they did n't yield gracefully, it would only result in alienating them completely from Grandfather Penfield, and realizing that he must pursue without flinching the policy he had inaugurated on the day of the battle, if he would not lose the ground which he had

gained, refuted all Edith's arguments by the simple expedient of giving her another thumping.

While these incidents were going forward, Fred Filbert had begun once more to drop in at Dora's. The loss of his manuscript had been a knock-down blow. He had used in making his changes the original type-written manuscript and the one copy he had had made with it, cutting out some passages, transposing others, dividing sheets in the middle, inserting new stuff and pasting them together, intending when it was finished to have a copy made of the completed work, but his impatience to give it into Charles's hands had made him decide not to wait; therefore, with those flying sheets had disappeared forever his latest novel.

After the first shock of his disappointment he had made an effort to rewrite it from memory and such scattered notes as he had left, but the task proved such drudgery that he gave it up in despair, decided to accept the fact that the fruits of a year's labor had been swept away, and face the formidable task of a completely new novel.

Fred, after making this resolve, cleared his table, placed his typewriter squarely in the middle of it, inserted two sheets of fresh white paper — with a new sheet of carbon paper between them — under the roller and sat down to begin.

Fred sat for a long time without striking a key.

Presently he got up, filled a pipe, and sat down again.

After sitting before the typewriter for an hour without writing one word, he got up and read the morning paper, hoping to chance on some incident which would give him something to start on, but without success.

He repeated this for a week before he realized that what he faced was not a new novel, but the lack of one. Not an idea — not the shadow of one — appeared after repeated cudgellings, out of the recesses of his brain. The realization that he could think of nothing to write about surprised and rather frightened him, and getting into his coat he made a call on Dora. Dora was glad to see him, as she always was, and Fred became a regular visitor.

The success of "Pansy," made more dazzling by contrast with his own disaster, had begun to reveal Dora in a new aspect. She was becoming a personage, and if she was willing to work — Fred naïvely assuming without question that she possessed what he lacked, a store of available material — there was no reason why she should n't make twenty thousand a year, or even more, indefinitely. And, besides, what a peach! Any man might be proud of a wife like that! He was coming to the conclusion that it was about time for him to marry and settle down.

The Kilkenny at this time seemed like some being reposing drowsily with steady, somnolent inhalations, unconscious of approaching dynamic events which were to affect its destiny. A sense of shrouded commotion, to be sure, issued from the Blomfield apartment whenever

the door was opened, owing to the pre-marital activities being carried on inside by Millicent assisted by Miss McGuirk, the second floor back dressmaker. But beyond that a quite unusual regularity seemed for a time to rule in the Kilkenny, and as the Blomfields' preparations demanded most of their spare time, as Vera was very quiet and occupied, too, over preparations to move, as Max was making ready for his wedding, and as Peter was away somewhere, Dora felt lonely. Fred's reappearance appeared opportune and their intercourse resumed some of its former isolation.

But while no physical activities of moment disturbed the routine of the Kilkenny, it was, nevertheless, watching — and waiting. The renewal of Fred's attentions to Dora stirred it deeply. By an imperceptible accumulation of facts and impressions — Fred's initial success, his intimacy with Dora, his departure to more splendid quarters, his staying away from his own party, his desertion of Dora for Edith, Rose's rumored fear and dislike of him, the violent termination of his relations with the house and family of Richmond, his outrageous treatment of Peter — with whom everybody sympathized — and the almost simultaneous phenomena of Dora's literary success and Fred's reappearance — the Kilkenny had arrived at the conclusion that Fred was a trimmer — some of the tenants had always said so — and now that Dora had grasped fame and fortune had come back again to marry her if he could. The Kilkenny was "on to" Fred, and while it regarded Dora

with warmer sympathy and liking than ever, and for her sake tried to tolerate him, it was watching him with alert and hostile eyes.

But of all this Fred and Dora were blissfully unconscious. They began to go about alone together again. Almost every evening now Fred dropped in before dinner, and on each occasion, as he waited in the parlor, there would issue from the pantry the sound of ice rattling in a shaker, and presently Dora, with her fair hair meticulously waved, dressed in some stunning costume, would come in, followed by Rose bearing two cocktails.

Fred's gold cigarette-case would appear immediately, Dora would take a cigarette, Fred another, and they would smoke them while drinking their cocktails, but hardly had the glasses been set down empty when Fred would be standing by Dora holding her wrap, and they would descend to the waiting taxi. In these days the taxi was always waiting — no running out for one now as he had had to the first time he had dined with her. Fred had learned a few things and Dora thought him much improved; and then presently while they were racing down the Avenue, with the sparkling panoply of the city whirling past them, Fred would say, "This is like old times, Dora," and Dora, who loved it all quite dearly, would answer, "Yes, and how nice it is to have them back again."

Fred thought it nice, too. The rarefied atmosphere which he had been breathing on the heights had not exactly agreed with him. He liked, he was finding out, that

of lower altitudes better. It was warmer, more humid, more comfortable. The other by comparison had been too thin, too dry, too chilly, too harsh. Fred was glad to be back — he felt like a man who is home again before an agreeable fire after an excursion out into a wintry landscape; the sensation loosened his tongue, and he talked more freely, more simply than had been his habit. "Yes," thought Dora, "he's much improved," and talked freely, too.

But there was one topic on which Fred found her reserved — the topic was "Pansy."

Fred had read it, and, applying to it the only test he knew, that of its commercial possibilities, pronounced it good. Dora seemed gratified, but was apparently more interested in his work than her own, and questioned him so particularly that he was obliged to explain that he had not yet been able to finish the revision of his last book owing to the press of other business. He would have liked to discuss "Pansy" with her — whether the sales had actually reached the figures advertised by Richmond Sons & Richmond — what royalties she was getting — what her next was to be like; but Dora was so persistently unresponsive about it that he decided to drop the subject. After all, it did n't matter. The book was having a big sale and Dora ought to be able to get about anything she wanted out of any publisher.

Fred, who, since his failure to make any progress whatever on a new book, had begun to wonder whether he had any material left to work with, was sometimes

frightened when he looked ahead. If it turned out that his fountain *had* run dry, all he could see, if he struggled on alone, was a return, perhaps, to the humble reportorial job of the past — but with Dora he would be safe. The prospect of a future with Dora — Dora making large sums with her books, and out of the abundance of her fertile imagination helping him with his — beckoned him — glowed rosily attractive like some ideally perfect stage picture bathed in supernally warm and golden light; therefore Fred called at the Kilkenny assiduously, always on his best behavior and was unremitting in his efforts to give Dora a good time.

The resumption by Fred and Dora of their old habits of comradeship seemed to have a mysterious and stimulating effect on Rose and Sid. Rose's attitude toward Fred had never been one of approval, and was not now, but her passive resentment of his attentions to Dora now gave place to an attitude of nervous curiosity. Instead of disappearing when Fred called, she now seemed bent upon observing him as closely as possible — she was forever hanging about. If Fred and Dora were in the parlor, Rose would always find something about which to busy herself silently in the adjoining room. She seemed to be trying to form some opinion as to the status and tendency of Fred's and Dora's relations with each other. Almost always Fred's calls were followed by mysterious conferences between Rose and Sid, after which Sid would stroll down toward Sixth Avenue until he came opposite the apartment house where Dr.

Marsham had his office, when, with a hurried glance to right and left, he would dash inside and ring the doctor's bell. But of all this Dora and Fred were quite unconscious.

One night when Fred was escorting her to the Kilkenny after an evening at the theatre — Fred was inclined to be ceremonious these days and almost always left her at her door — the said door was opened from within by Millicent. Max was standing beside her.

"Rose has gone to bed," she announced. "I told her we would wait for you."

Millicent seemed disturbed about something and Max's mild countenance wore a markedly lugubrious expression.

"Anything the matter?" asked Dora. "Come in, Fred."

"Muriel never showed up again!" answered Millicent bitterly.

"Not at the theatre!" cried Dora.

"No! That's the second time. Mr. Isaacs said to-night if it was n't that the 'Spyglass's only got another week to run he'd have fired us both — anyway, he won't have *her* back, and I'll have to do it all by myself. It's too rotten of her, *I* think."

"Did you tell Vera?" asked Dora.

"No; their windows are all dark. They must have gone to bed. It's too mean," Millicent went on, "just at the end of the show and just as Max and I are going to get married, to leave me in the lurch like that when I

wanted to have it wind up to the credit of both of us!"

Millicent was almost in tears.

"It's too bad of Muriel," answered Dora, genuinely vexed. "It's Tim Richmond, I suppose. I wish he would leave her alone!"

"And now I've got to do it by myself for a whole week. It is n't so bad when we danced together, but now, just when I'm going to — to — get — married —" And Millicent began to boohoo — in some curious way now that marriage lay close before her, her sense of modesty had been shocked at the idea of doing the dance alone. Max was beside himself, and he and Dora did their best to console her. Presently the telephone bell rang and Fred answered it. "Here's Tim Richmond now," and he turned to Millicent. "He wants to speak to you. He's been trying your flat, but nobody answered, so he thought you might be here."

"I don't want to speak to *him*," answered Millicent, wiping her eyes.

Fred delivered this message.

"Then he wants to speak to Max!"

Max went to the telephone and began to listen to what seemed a long explanation of some kind from Tim. At one point he raised his unoccupied hand with a gesture of astonishment, and toward the end his expression began to resume its old characteristics of placid satisfaction. Presently, covering the mouthpiece of the telephone, he announced:

"He wants us all to come to the Alcazar."

"Well, he can go on wanting!" answered Millicent.
"I'm not going!"

"I would n't think of it," said Dora.

Max informed Tim that the ladies thought it too late to go out again and then did some more listening.

"Tim says it is very important," he announced at length.

"Tell him it is very important for Muriel to keep her dates!" retorted Millicent.

Max delivered this message.

"Vell!" he said at length. "He did n't want you to know until you got over there, so it would be a surprise — but he and Muriel have just got married and they are having their wedding supper. He says won't you please come? I think we had better go," Max added.

"Why did n't they let us know beforehand," Dora exclaimed, "so that we could have gone to it?"

"Well, thank God, they're married!" was Millicent's comment. "That's a relief! I suppose we ought to go now."

"Oh, yes, Millicent," answered Dora, "I think we ought."

Max thereupon accepted Tim's invitation, telephoned for a taxi, and in ten minutes they were at the Alcazar. Tim was waiting in the foyer and steered them to his table, where Muriel was sitting with a lively young married couple, friends of Tim's, and, to Millicent's intense surprise, Mr. Isaacs, the manager of the theatre

where the "Spyglass" was running, and who earlier that night had told Millicent to tell Muriel that she need n't come back.

"Well, you see," explained Tim, "we were up at Claremont having lunch with our friends, Mr. and Mrs. Gates here" — indicating the young married couple — "and all of a sudden we made up our minds to get married. I did n't know any ministers, neither did Muriel and neither did Mrs. Gates, but Gatesy had a second cousin who was one, up in Poughkeepsie. Well, we figured that by quick work we could get to Poughkeepsie, get married, and be back here just in time for Millicent's and Muriel's turn in the 'Spyglass.' Muriel tried to get Millicent on the 'phone from Claremont, but could n't. Well, we all hustled into the motor and off we started, but everything went against us. Gatesy's second cousin was officiating at a funeral when we got there and that delayed us a couple of hours; then we had a hard time hunting up the chap who issues the licenses; then after we'd started the ceremony we found that we had n't any ring, so we had to suspend proceedings while Muriel and I went out and got one — but even then we would have been back in time if the gasoline had n't given out, which made it necessary for poor Gatesy to walk five miles for help, and if something had n't gone wrong with the carburetor a little later so that he had to walk five miles more. Poor Gatesy never walked ten miles in one day before in his whole life, but never mind, Gatesy, you're too fat anyway, and it'll do you good.

Well, we tried for all we were worth to get to the theatre in time, but it was no use. Millicent had been on alone and had left the house. Well, I knew that Muriel had failed her once before through my fault, and the only way I could see to make good was by explaining the whole thing to Isaacs here. Well, I must say that Isaacs acted like a white man. He said he would forgive Muriel on two conditions; one that she stay in the show until the wind up next week, and the other that we immediately beat it to the Alcazar for a wedding supper as his guests, Millicent to be included and any friends we could rake together. Well that's the story, Millicent, and we're sorry it happened and have done our best to make it right again. Well, here's the cocktails and here's luck all around!"

They had a jolly evening together, but as Dora and Fred walked back to Dora's flat together — Millicent and Max leading the way — Dora suddenly grew quiet, and when Fred, noticing it, asked the reason, she answered:

"I was thinking how changed the old Kilkenny will seem when they are all gone. Muriel gone already, Millicent a week from now, and about the same time Vera and her father. It makes me sad. It will never be the same again, Fred."

Fred knew his chance had come.

"It'll be lonely, won't it!" he said.

"I'm afraid it will, Fred," she answered.

"And I'm lonely, too," said Fred, "and I want to

come back again to my old flat, but I don't want it changed, Dora! I don't want the doorway plastered up again. I want it to be just as it is so that you and I can live there together. I want you to marry me, Dora!"

Dora gave him a quick look and walked on in silence.

"I know I've been rotten to you once or twice," Fred went on. "Do you know why? Because I did n't appreciate you. I was too green to understand you, but I'm a different man to-day, Dora, and as I look back now I'm sure that while I did n't have sense enough to know it — I've always wanted you."

"Did you, Fred?" she answered quietly.

"Yes, I'm sure of it. As sure as I am that I'm alive. What do you say, Dora?"

Dora, who seemed to be thinking deeply, with a faint shadow of sadness on her face, did not answer.

"We could be happy together there, Dora," Fred went on. "We're congenial, we like the same things, we've been already together a great deal without getting tired of each other. I'm sure we'd be happy! What do you say, Dora?"

"Let me think about it, Fred," she answered at last. "I can't tell you to-night. Young people like Muriel and Millicent, Max and Tim, marry without a thought of the future, they have the courage; but we are older, Fred, and we must be very sure. Give me a week. A week from to-day is Millicent's wedding day and that evening they will be with me until they start for their train. I shall have a party for them, the best I can give,

and what with getting ready for that and thinking over what you've just said, my head will be full. But by a week from to-day I shall know. Don't even try to see me until then and at my party I'll tell you. You did n't —" Dora began and stopped.

"I know what you were going to say. You were going to say that I did n't come to the last."

"Yes, I was, and then I thought it would be unkind. But you *did* n't come, Fred, and it was given on purpose for you."

"I know it, Dora. I said that I'd behaved rottenly more than once, but I'll come to this one all right. Will you forgive me for not coming to the other?"

"I had already, Fred, long ago."

"And you can't tell me now, Dora?"

"No, Fred, I must think. Give me a week."

"And is there any hope, Dora?"

And although Dora answered, "What can I say, Fred? I'm not quite sure myself!" she added with a smile, "A week from to-night!"

Max and Millicent were waiting at the door and heard this final sentence, and as Fred and Dora came up, the light from the street-lamp fell on their faces.

"Do you know what he's been doing, Max?" said Millicent a moment later as Max was saying good-night on the stairs. "He's been proposing to her, and she's going to let him know a week from to-night!"

"Put she von't take him!" Max exclaimed. "Nein! Nein! That vould pe too bad!"

"Of course she'll take him!"

"Put vy?" asked Max.

"Because she's too easy-going and because she's lonely and because she — well, for lots of reasons; but it would be awful, Max! Somebody ought to do something!"

CHAPTER XXVI

Biff! Bing! Fifty feet stamp the floor as twenty-five young men in white evening waistcoats whirl their partners dizzily. Everybody is dancing, swaying, singing, whistling, or nodding — because why — because Max is at the piano. Max, married only an hour or two ago, has simply got to play until it's time for him and Mrs. Max to catch the midnight train for Niagara Falls.

Biff! Bing! Once more fifty feet leap into the air, descending with a crash. This is some party! Dust rises through the cracks of Dora St. David's floor and the bachelor sleepers in the Lucullus across the way turn restlessly in their dreams. Over in a corner Auntie Wagstaff sits waving a highball glass, hoping somebody will notice that it's empty. The little Jew husband, clasped in the arms of his opulent wife, is turning like lightning, round and round. The four young ladies of the third floor rear flash here and there, pursued relentlessly by the young gentlemen who live above them, Tim and Mrs. Tim are whirling as rapidly as anybody, Ted has taken charge of Vera, Fred has already wilted two collars in his determination to do his share in making the party a success, Uncle John spinning in the muscular embrace of Millicent is growing quite giddy, and in the kitchen Rose and Sid — the latter with a pocketful of cigars in case the policeman should look in — are doing

a rapid patter of their own in time to the beat of the piano!

All at once Max shifts rapidly to the music of the "Spyglass" and begins a humming accompaniment, buzzing like a great bee.

"Muriel! Millicent!" cries the little Jew husband. "Vonce more now, for the last time. The 'Spyglass' tance!" And a shout rises causing the sleepers across the way to mutter wrathfully.

"Sure! Sure! They'll dance the 'Spyglass' dance! Sure they will!"

"But we can't with skirts on!" There is another shout.

"Sure you can! Try it, anyway!" And Millicent and Muriel cry:

"All right! Give us room!"

A circle is formed — Muriel and Millicent leap to the middle of it, and with a flash of skirts, arms, silver slippers, and blond hair, a modified "Spyglass" dance is danced, sliding under Max's guidance into a one-step at the end in which everybody joins. All the punch has already disappeared and there is only whiskey left.

"There vill be some headaches in the morning!" cries the little Jew.

Some of the young men — it is barely ten o'clock — are beginning already to knock the ashes of their cigarettes into imaginary ash trays, and already Auntie Wagstaff's eyes have somehow got themselves crossed. Biff! Bing!

"It's a splendid party, Dora!" said Ted, as he and

Vera stopped before her. It was Ted's turn to dance with her.

"Yes, but it will be the last one!"

"Why?" asked Vera.

"Because everybody's going away!"

"Good gracious, Dora, we're not going to China!"

"It won't be the same, Vera. When do you go to your grandfather's new house?"

"To-morrow!" answered Vera.

"You are going. Your father is going. Muriel and Millicent are going, and Peter has gone. It will be very lonely here to-morrow night!" said Dora.

"We're not going to let you be lonely," answered Vera.

And Ted added, "Peter's coming back to-morrow."

There was a shout over by the doorway. Some new arrival was receiving warm felicitations. Vera looked. It was Peter himself, whose eyes she knew were searching for her. He presented evidence of a hurried toilet. His tie had been tied with nervous haste, and above his worried features a shock of black hair stood up as if asking to be brushed. Vera laughed as she greeted him, and presently they found themselves alone together.

"Your train was early, was n't it?" Vera asked by way of a beginning.

"No, it was late," answered Peter.

"Ted said you were coming to-morrow."

"Well, I changed my mind."

"Why did n't you write to me more than just once?"

"You know, Vera," answered Peter; "because I was ashamed!"

"That may have been the reason, but it was not a good excuse!"

"I made *such* a fool of myself, Vera!"

"And you never thought, I suppose, that you were making a fool of *me*!"

Peter looked puzzled. "But how, Vera; nobody knew that we —"

"*You* knew! Did n't our engagement mean anything? What had I promised to marry you for? Was that the extent of your valuation of me? Was I only a fair-weather friend who could n't be relied upon unless the sun was shining?"

"Vera!" cried Peter appealingly; "*that* is n't what I thought!"

"It's what *I* thought! *You* never bothered to think about anything except your own feelings. Your whole course of action was dictated by injured vanity and pride. I wish you had considered me a little more!"

Peter looked miserably at her, but did not speak.

Presently Vera asked, "What are you going to do now that you're back again?"

"Look for a job."

"What kind of a job?"

"Almost any kind; it does n't matter much!"

"Have you stopped writing?"

"Yes, for good."

Vera stamped her foot so viciously that Peter started.

"Peter!" she exclaimed. "You make me lose all patience with you!"

"I know it," Peter answered, very humbly for him, "but I'm not fitted to be a writer —"

"Indeed you are and you are not going to stop!"

"If you would help me, Vera."

"Why not?" answered Vera. Her resentment over his flight had vanished long ago.

"Oh, Vera, you did n't understand about my going away. It was because I felt so unworthy of you, that was why. As if I had acted like a traitor going to Mrs. Richmond's day after day when you were in the country bored to death as likely as not. I felt as if you would never forgive me."

"That's the way I felt, too," answered Vera.

Presently she said:

"You *will* write, won't you, Peter?"

"*Will* I!" exclaimed Peter. "If you will only forgive me! Will you take me back, Vera?"

A wave of tenderness swept her. Here was something to protect, to watch over, to feed, to shield from draughts; — something to be made to wear rubbers in rainy weather, an overcoat in cold; — something to be brushed, dusted, mended, buttoned, scrubbed, doctored, and washed; — something to be fondled, scolded, and to a slight degree hoodwinked; — in addition to all this, this something was rather dear — it was too tempting.

"Will you, Vera?"

"Oh, Peter, it won't be quite as nice as we think it's going to be!"

"It's bound to be, Vera!"

"But it won't, Peter!"

"But if we both try, we'll make it so!"

"All right, Peter, we'll try!"

During this scene another of like nature was reaching its culmination, fraught — according to the opinions of the Kilkennyites — with dire possibilities of evil.

Under the apparent *abandon* of the hour, through these rushing currents of sound, light, and movement, something like suspense was running restlessly. The Kilkenny, accepting Millicent's prognostications, knew that Dora's fate was hanging in the balance, knew that Dora's answer was to be given Fred that night, and while they agreed with Millicent that something should be done about it, knew no more than she did how to do it.

Hardly was the evening under way when it became plain that Fred was trying to get Dora by herself in order to wrest the promised answer from her, and that Dora for some reason was trying to avoid him — probably not wishing to take the fatal step sooner than she must; and no sooner was this evident than the Kilkenny with unholy glee combined to keep Fred from learning his fate. The moment a dance was over Ted, Tim, or some one else was at Dora's elbow asking for the next one. If Fred seemed about to seek privacy in Dora's small sitting-room with Dora, watchful eyes saw to it

that he was forestalled. If Fred, finding the sitting-room occupied, bent a course for the dining-room, somebody, by way of the kitchen door, would reach there first. Repeated disappointments at last began to affect Fred's resolute amiability and his brow grew so dark that Dora, without perceiving that his plans were being frustrated with intention, felt sorry for him and helped him at last to a moment's interview. Then it was that the Kilkenny, regarding Fred balefully through the open door, watched covertly with strong suspense the faces of Fred and Dora who were standing in the hall. When Dora smiled, a shudder of apprehension ran through the guests; when her face grew grave, a smile of relief communicated itself from one to another.

"Is he proposing to her?"

"No, he proposed a week ago. Millicent heard him."

"What did she say?"

"Said she'd tell him to-night!"

"Do you think she's accepting him?"

"She's looking at him mighty sweet!"

"She's sugar-coating the pill she's going to make him swallow!"

"Well, I say she'll take him!"

"She's a damsight too good for him!"

"Of course she is, something ought to be done."

Fred in the hall had finally succeeded in putting the question point-blank.

"Which is it, Dora. Yes or No?"

Dora hesitated. She seemed to be wavering, and

Fred's own future seemed trembling in the balance. He thought that it was all over, and was just preparing to make a fight for it when she looked at him strangely, almost as if frightened, and with a quiver of the lips she answered tremulously:

"It's all right, Fred!"

At this appealing, upward glance caught in transit by the watchers in the adjoining room, and at Fred's answering expression of bland satisfaction, everybody knew that the game was up. Morose glances were interchanged, heads were shaken dubiously, and the flame of gaiety which had begun to burn so brightly seemed to be succumbing to the smothering influences of some invisible extinguisher. Max at the piano noticed it, and said to Millicent:

"Vat is the matter? I can get no more life in them. They are hanging like a vait on my shoulders!"

"Well, they're on to the fact that Dora's accepted Fred, and Fred is n't popular," answered Millicent.

But if this event had depressed the Kilkennyites, not so Fred. His spirits had risen rapidly, and noticing a certain recession from the earlier vivacity of the evening he set himself to rectify it without understanding in the least that he was its cause. Under the influence of the punch and the growing realization of his good fortune, he began to dominate the entire party; his voice rose each moment more assertive, more confident; more and more he assumed the position of master of ceremonies; and while by a strenuous vivacity he sought to spur the

assemblage to renewed gaiety, he did not hesitate to admonish it when necessary. But for all his efforts, to which Dora's guests responded almost sullenly, and for all Dora's, to which they answered by well-meant but disheartening efforts, the vital spark had departed.

Presently Wadham Robinson, who was quite unsteady on his feet, upset a whiskey bottle, nearly full. Fred came bustling up, exclaiming:

"Say, Robinson, be careful, can't you! There's nearly a quart of whiskey wasted! Here, somebody, tell Rose to wipe it up!"

"Well, what'r *you* worryin' about?" answered Robinson in tones of maudlin resentment. "'T is n't your whiskey!"

"I did n't say it was. But a quart of whiskey 's a quart of whiskey. No matter whose it is!"

"Well, don't you shposh I know that!" retorted Robinson irritably. "My God! I ain't a fool!"

"There's no use arguing about it," replied Fred officiously. "Here, you're standing right in the middle of it. Move over there, will you?"

"Why should n't I shtand in the middle of it if I want to?" returned Robinson combatively. "I spilled it!"

"Stand over here, will you?" answered Fred again. "Rose wants to wipe it up!"

"Come on, Wadham!" Tim interrupted. "Let her wipe it up! You're getting your feet wet!"

Robinson waved an uncertain but reassuring hand.

"Never you mind, ole man! I won't catch cold! Can't catch cold by getting your feet wet in wishkey. A little wishkey on the outside don't do anybody any harm. Do good. Lots o' good. But *he* would n't use it that way" — indicating Fred — "too dam' stingy!"

Fred was beginning to lose his temper.

"Well, are you going to move or shall I make you!" he exclaimed angrily.

"Make me!" cried Robinson, as if intensely surprised at this ultimatum. "Make me! Shlike to see anybody make *me* do things!"

"Come along now!" returned Fred determinedly. "Just wait a minute, Dora! I'm attending to this!" And putting an arm through one of Robinson's he began to exert a slight pressure. Robinson yielded to it with unexpected acquiescence, and Fred finally left him standing across the room where he stood for a time lost apparently in deep and morose meditation.

"Shay!" he remarked at last, addressing himself vaguely to the room in general. "Whoshe party is this?" And after a pause, "I ashk you! Whoshe is it?"

"Never mind whose it is," answered Tim. "Enjoy yourself!"

"But I ashk you! Whoshe is it? Know what I think? I *mush* have made a mistake. I thought it was Miss St. David's, but I *mush* have been wrong. I'm going to apologize!" And he crossed the room unsteadily to Fred.

"Shay, ole man," he stopped in front of Fred and ex-

tended an uncertain hand. "I must apologish. I thought thish was Miss St. David's party. But I wash mish-taken. Mush be yours! Eh?"

A sudden idea seized Fred. Why not clinch it! Dora's "yes" had been a little half-hearted, he thought. Why not commit her to it publicly, and grasping Robinson's hand he answered in a hearty voice which filled Dora's parlors.

"No, you were n't mistaken, old man. This *is* Dora's party, but the next time she gives one she'll be Mrs. Filbert!"

At this uncompromising confirmation of their gloomiest fears a shudder passed through the length and breadth of Dora's flat, communicating its apprehensions at last to Rose and Sid in the kitchen. Amid a volley of perfunctory congratulations and an indiscriminate cheer from the small Jew, Rose with staring eyes darted into the hall demanding of the first person she met there, who happened to be Vera, "Wat's that he says?"

"Mr. Filbert and Miss Dora are going to get married," answered Vera.

Whereupon Rose rushed back into the kitchen, where Sid, after listening to a few hurried, whispered sentences, seized his hat and tumbling down the stairway started on a run for Sixth Avenue.

The Kilkenny, determined, for Dora's sake, to make the best of it, had now surrounded Fred and Dora, who were standing side by side. A sort of impromptu recep-

tion started itself. The guests shook them by the hand in turn and each felicitated them according to their capacity as phrase-makers.

"Vait!" cried the little Jew. "A trink all around to the health of the future Mrs. Filbert."

Immediately a rush was made for the tables. Fifty glasses were seized, charged with ice, portioned with whiskey, siphons were squirted into them, and the little Jew, when everybody was ready, raising his as a signal, cried: "Now all togedder! Three cheers for Dora St. Davit, the celebrated authoress!"

But even as the shout arose — steps were sounding on the stairs — footsteps of fate — and as the third cheer ended and the little Jew cried, "To the healt of the future Mrs. Filbert!" the door flew open, and the Napoleonic doctor strode in, hesitated a moment, and advancing straight to Dora cried in his strong compelling voice, "Don't you know me, Dora?" And Dora, after one stare of puzzled recognition, screamed, "Walter!" and reeled into Vera's arms.

Around the actors in the drama which now all knew instinctively was to be unfolded, Dora's guests grouped themselves. Max, leaving the piano, joined Millicent. At Dora's right stood Vera — with Peter beside her; behind Vera, Uncle John; on Dora's left, Tim and Mrs. Tim; behind these, and on either side, Ted, Wadham Robinson, and the young ladies and gentlemen of the Kilkenny; in the frame of the doorway Sid and Rose stared with white eyeballs, and against the walls of the

room the remaining guests; before Dora and to one side stood Fred Filbert, and, facing this array, calm but purposeful, the indomitable doctor upon whom Dora never ceased to stare with a fixed look compounded of fascination and terror.

For an instant there hung upon this scene a curtain of such strained silence as might envelop a Roman audience at the beginning of a combat between two famous gladiators, but in a moment the curtain was rent by the voice of the doctor.

"Dora, are you thinking of marrying this man?" And he indicated Fred with a movement of the hand.

Dora's bosom heaved, it seemed as with an effort to prevent herself from speaking, but, in obedience to a will more powerful than her own, she answered, "Yes!"

"Let me beseech you not to!"

"You get out of here!" cried Fred, suddenly repeating a familiar formula of his to which the doctor paid not the slightest attention. "You get out!"

"Let me beseech you not to, Dora!" the doctor repeated.

And at this Dora burst out wildly: "Why have you come here? Why do you insist on interfering? I felt, I feared, that you were somewhere near me. I am nothing to you! When you played the tyrant I was bound to you! I am not bound now! You ruined my life, but to ruin it you had to free me! You would like to have ruined me and yet kept me a slave, but you could n't!

Please go! I can't bear to see you, to hear you, it makes me too unhappy! Never again in any way will I let you for one moment interfere in my affairs!"

The doctor's look and manner had at first engaged the sympathy of the spectators, but at Dora's words the tide turned, murmurs were heard. "You're not wanted here!" — "You'd better go!" — "Who asked *you* to come!" And even a step or two was taken threateningly toward him, but the doctor with a lightning glance quelled this incipient rising and spoke once more, this time not to Dora, but to the audience at large.

"You wonder, perhaps, why I have come here. It is because I have arrived lately at the conclusion that I owe to Dora St. David all the reparation one individual can make to another. At one time I did her an almost irreparable injury. I punished her most terribly for something I believed her to have been guilty of, but as time went on and I was able to assume a more impartial standpoint, I began to fear that I had done her an injustice and although I still doubted I decided to come to New York, assume for the time another name, settle as near her as I dared, and attempt to find out whether her life here would substantiate my former convictions or my later doubts of those convictions. I am a man entirely unfitted by occupation, tastes, and temperament to marry anybody, and yet I was Dora St. David's husband — she did n't recognize me immediately when I came in because in those days I wore a beard — and as her husband I believed certain things

of her which I now know to be untrue. I say *believed*, because while I had no facts — only surmises! — I *wanted* to believe. I had no facts then, and have none now, but while I believed then that I was right, I *know* now that I was wrong. You will, perhaps, perceive the weakness of my statement, and answer that my last conclusion is as illogical as my first, both being based on mere assumption; but, my friends, let me tell you that once and for all I have dethroned logic from my mind and have placed feeling there instead. Reason at one time was my God. Don't trust it; it is cold, selfish, hard, and unreliable — for the future, 'Heart not Head' shall be my motto!"

At this moment a plaintive voice rose.

"Shay, ole man, cut it short or I'll have to go home!" And Wadham Robinson was seen to sink languidly into a sofa. The doctor cast a contemptuous glance at this weakling and proceeded.

"I am bound to wipe out in every way I can the injury I have done Dora St. David, and I feel that my first duty to her is to prevent, if possible, her marriage with this creature who stands at my right!"

"She has promised!" cried Fred.

At the doctor's confession of his misjudgment of her, a look of expectation had lighted Dora's eyes which instantly she resolutely quenched. She would allow him to raise no false hopes only to destroy them, and after Fred's asseveration, she repeated:

"Yes, I promised."

"Break your promise, then!" cried the doctor inexorably.

"Why?" answered Dora vehemently. "Why? For what reason? Why will you interfere? You took away everything I had! *That's* what you always did, took things away from me — deprived me of one thing after another until I had nothing left; and now you want to take away my chance of having a home once more, of being once more the kind of woman I was before! You want to take *that* away, too! What do you offer in return?"

"You are right, Dora. I was tyrannical, domineering, suspicious, and unjust, and in reparation, if you will break with him, I offer you your children!"

At this blinding promise Dora put her hands to her eyes for a moment as if to shut out its unexpected radiance, but presently she took them down again, and the spectators of this curious scene saw her turn a pale, imploring face toward the doctor.

"Is that your condition?" she asked.

"That is my condition, Dora. Give him up and the children shall be yours once more."

"And if I refuse to break my promise?"

"In that case we must go on as we are!"

Dora turned slowly to Fred.

"Which is it, Fred? I've promised you and — "

"And I'll hold you to it!" cried Fred. "He's had his say, now let me have mine. I know why he's come here with his offer. I know why he wants to keep us apart;

just listen and I'll tell you. Over a year ago he asked me to marry you!" he turned to the doctor. "Do you deny it?"

"I asked you then," retorted the doctor, "because, while I still doubted her, I thought it would be for her good. At that time I did n't know *you*! When I made up my mind that I had made a mistake, I got Sid Smallshaw here to keep me posted as to what was going on!"

"All right, you don't deny it." And Fred went on: "He did the best he knew how to get me to, tried to make me promise, and pestered me about it night and day. Do you know why? Because while he had succeeded legally in getting you off his hands, he still had a sneaking sense that morally he was responsible and he wanted to evade that, too. He practically admits it. Now let me ask you, why has he changed? You don't know, but I do. The Dora St. David of to-day is, in his opinion, a very different person from the Dora St. David of a year ago. Dora St. David has surprised everybody by writing a successful novel —"

"A novel!" cried the doctor disgustedly. "*I* did n't know that she'd written a novel! Do you think I've got nothing better to do than keep track of such trash? I never read a novel in my life and never intend to!"

"That's what he says, but don't believe him!" continued Fred. "Of course, he'd deny any knowledge of it, but it's a very curious thing that after keeping away from her for four years, returning her letters unopened, refusing to let her see her children, he turns up just as

she's made her fame and fortune with 'Pansy' and tries to prevent her from marrying *me!*"

At this moment a staggering interruption occurred, for Vera in a loud, clear voice cried:

"Dora did n't write 'Pansy.' I wrote it! I did n't want anybody to know, so I asked her to typewrite it for me and sign the contracts. Everybody thought she wrote it and I asked her not to deny it. She never *said* she did!"

At Vera's avowal of the authorship of "Pansy" a groan resounded through the room, and Uncle John, recalling certain of his strictures in Vera's presence on that celebrated work, collapsed beside Wadham Robinson on the sofa. On noticing this, the corner of Vera's mouth twitched slightly into a little curve of pardonable malice, and she went on with her confession.

"After I'd been at the suffrage headquarters for a while work got slack and there was n't anything for me to do there. It was then that I made up my mind to try my hand at a novel. I did n't want any one to know about it, and so I went to Grandfather Penfield and accepted an allowance he had offered me some time before, but which I had refused. They had more room at the suffrage headquarters than they needed, and they let me go there and work at a desk which they let me have all to myself. I never told any one what I was doing, and my father thought that I was still employed there. I told Dora about it, and she wanted something to do and offered to type it, and after it was finished I got nervous and asked her to do the rest!"

While Vera was speaking, Fred was doing some very rapid thinking. Fred was not wholly mercenary. The discovery that the royalties from "Pansy" were going to some one else was a hard blow, but he liked Dora and remembered that according to the doctor she was in receipt of an independent income of four thousand a year; therefore he began to speak again.

"While I have listened to Miss Wildwood's statement with surprise and — on account of my concern in Miss St. David's welfare — with regret, I can only repeat what I said before — and I am sure in doing so that I have her best interests at heart — that I decline to release Miss St. David from her promise!" And he looked triumphantly at the doctor, who, he uneasily observed, was wearing a broad smile.

"One moment," answered the doctor. "From what has just passed I gather that a novel written by this lady" — indicating Vera — "has been lately published, and that popular report has attributed its authorship to Miss St. David. I also gather from what Filbert has said that it has met with some measure of success. Is that correct?"

"Is it!" Tim Richmond here interposed; "I should say so! The author of that book has jumped into a following that she could n't shake if she tried. She's good for thirty thousand dollars a year for as many years as she cares to write. My firm published it, and I know!"

"Then this makes necessary a few words of acknowledgment to Filbert," continued the doctor. "Filbert

when he proposed to and was accepted by Dora St. David unquestionably believed her to be the author of the novel called 'Pansy,' and his refusal to recede from his position, after learning that this supposition was false, is deserving of much praise. To be sure, Dora still has an income of four thousand a year, but compared with the thirty thousand he thought she was earning it is an insignificant amount. I feel, therefore, that with his example before me I must not be less generous and I hereby withdraw my opposition to Filbert and publicly declare that Dora St. David may have the children, anyway!"

Fred for a moment was nonplussed. His jaw dropped and power of speech seemed to have deserted him, but presently recovering himself with an effort, he turned an expression of angry sarcasm on the doctor whose face was still wreathed in smiles.

"You think you're mighty smart, don't you! Now that you know that Dora did n't write 'Pansy' you're not only satisfied to have her marry anybody she wants to, but you're anxious to get rid of your children. Well, it won't work here!"

The doctor waved a polite hand toward Dora.

"Oh, I'm out of the matter altogether. You and Dora are the only persons concerned now. The children are Dora's to do as she pleases with, and so I suppose are you!"

"You think so, do you?" cried Fred angrily. "Well, you've got another guess coming! Look here! A minute

ago you gave Dora the choice between me and her children. All right, now I'll do the same. Which is it, Dora? If you insist on having your children, why, all right, but count me out!"

"Thatsh right!" remarked Wadham from the sofa, trying to assume a judicial attitude. "Four thousand dollarsh hardly enough for four!"

And the doctor cried electrically:

"Now, gentlemen and ladies, we've at last got Filbert where we want him. Do you suppose that if he really cared for Dora he would let her children stand in his way? Do you suppose that he would make my conditions his? Don't you suppose he would be glad and happy to make *her* happy in every way he could? Of course he would! Dora, what do *you* say? He's put it up to you! Let's hear your answer."

And Dora, her eyes brimming, cried: "Where are they, Walter? I can't wait to see them! I'll go to-night! Have you a time-table —?"

Whereupon a bellow so loud, so despairing, that it transfixed the entire party shook the windows, and Max was observed to be gazing frantically at his watch:

"Ve have our train missed!"

"Never mind, Maxy, we'll go to-morrow!" And Millicent threw her arms around his neck. "We could n't go now, anyway! The real party's only just beginning — at first it looked like it was bound to be Fred Filbert's — then the doctor took a hand, and I thought that he was going to monopolize the evening; but I see

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CHAPTER XXVII

FRED FILBERT issued from the entrance of the Kilkenny, and as he paused for a moment, halted by some subconscious irresolution, Max's six chords sounded faintly in his ears, with the portent both of a prelude and of a finale. They seemed fraught with a significance he could but dimly understand, but he knew this, that they marked a farewell to an epoch of his life which — even as he had closed but now the door of Dora's flat — he had shut away forever, and through the promptings of those haunting and accusative strains, he, for the first time, realized, in part at least, the scope of his irremediable errors.

But this realization of defeat taught Fred no lesson. He was conscious, not of his own weakness, but of his opponent's strength. "Damn him! He held all the cards!" he muttered, thinking of the doctor, and forgetting two which would have made himself invincible — candor, and an honest purpose.

He had begun to walk, but now he paused again. From where he stood, he could still catch, by straining forward, an occasional faint hint of music, and as he glanced obliquely up at Dora's windows, from an angle so wide that only narrow lines of light were visible, he saw the silhouettes of figures passing swiftly on the shades.

Fred halted but for a moment, and then, with an impatient gesture, moved on again.

"The fools!" he muttered.

Well, they were all there! Almost his whole past seemed crowded, as he thought of it, into that room. Let 'em stay there for all he cared! *He* never wanted to see any of them again! A cheap bunch, all of them, even the ones who thought themselves better than anybody else! The Blomfields, that fat slob Bebel, Wadham Robinson, the drunken clown! And the rest of the aggregation of chippies and loafers! How he hated them all! And the other lot! Watergate and his chum Blakie, Vera and her father! So superior, so damned stuck on themselves! Watergate and Blakie because they were graduates of Harvard, he supposed, and Vera and her old man because they belonged to the Richmonds! The Richmonds! Who were the Richmonds! Tim Richmond had married a Broadway dancer, and if it had n't been for Watergate's butting in, he — Fred — by this time would be having his own way with Charlie Richmond's wife! A big lot the Richmonds had to be conceited about! The whole lot were a bunch of fools! Stupid fools, or conceited fools, or patronizing fools, but all fools!

Fred turned up Fifth Avenue, headed for his own rooms. It was quite late. A full moon, riding in a clear sky, cast arid shadows, and a chilly wind swept the empty spaces of the streets whose deserted vistas conduced him to the resentful meditations which filled his mind.

And they were all on the make just as much as anybody! Watergate had snapped up Vera the moment she had developed into a money-maker, and they would find out soon enough that Max had married to get some one to support him. As for Muriel and Tim — whom everybody thought so smart — each had tried to do the other, and Tim was the one who had got done! That was all there was to it! There was n't one in the whole push that had a right to think themselves better than anybody else!

And the doctor! My God, what a bully! Some day when he had a good chance, he'd like to punch his damned head for him! He'd never met nor heard of such a busybody! Of a man so stubborn, domineering, and meddlesome!

And yet — Perhaps he should have kept that promise which the doctor had forced from him. Perhaps it would have been better. Perhaps he had made a mistake not to — because Dora, after all, — well, Dora *was* different from the others!

He had thought at first that she was weak and frivolous when she was really steadfast — and only unhappy! Perhaps he had n't really appreciated her at her real value. He could have had her if he had wanted her — honestly; but he was n't looking for that kind of a bargain then. He had wanted everything for the price of a dinner or two at the Waldorf! He had made a mistake! He should have married her. In spite of all her love of going about, there was something reliable in her, some-

thing to depend on! Was it too late? Even with her kids it would be better than not at all! Was there still a chance?

Fred stopped abruptly, and then went on again. Something told him that it was too late.

He had reached his own door. He opened it with his latch-key — it was after closing time — and not seeing the elevator boy anywhere about, he began to mount the three flights leading to his flat.

Well, let 'em go to the devil, with their tangoing, and fooling about, and their pretensions, and their irritating, self-satisfied attitudes! The time would come when they'd be falling over each other to claim his acquaintance again. Watergate would never do anything better than he'd done already, and it remained to be seen whether Vera Wildwood could duplicate or even approach her success with "Pansy." If the truth were known, Dora had probably written more than half of it, anyway!

Fred let himself into his parlor, which was flooded with moonlight, and stood for a moment by the window in the semi-darkness.

Yes, he'd show 'em! The whole lot of 'em! Dora included! Dora had cast her lot with the others — all right! He was the only one who had made enough to get out of the Kilkenny, and what it stood for, excepting Vera Wildwood, who had n't proved yet what her success amounted to, and the end was not yet! He did n't care about the others, but some day Dora would be

sorry! Dora, beholding him astride the top wave, would wish him back again in vain! Dora would —!

He felt for the electric switch and pressed it — banishing the moonlight in an instant, by the pervading glow from the alabaster bowl — and as he turned, something caught his eye which caused him to stop abruptly and stand rigidly, regarding it.

It was the upper portion of a sheet of plain white paper, standing up from the cylinder of his typewriting machine, and this sheet of paper seemed at first to call out to him in loud tones, "You liar!" and then to stand silent.

It stood there as if waiting to be written on, and as Fred looked at it his face became ghastly. The paper reared its blank and immaculate surface, with an air of invitation and of challenge, with a waiting attitude, suppliant and yet inexorable, which seemed to put, relentlessly, a question to him, or to make some demand — which he could not escape — with a tyrannous air about its pale and immovable expectancy, more overpowering, even, than the doctor's most domineering manner.

"Come now!" it seemed to say to him. "I've been waiting for you! You may ride astride the top wave if you want to! Everything is possible if you have the wit to make it so! What do you intend to do? Are you going to begin?"

And Fred knew that he was not.

THE END

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